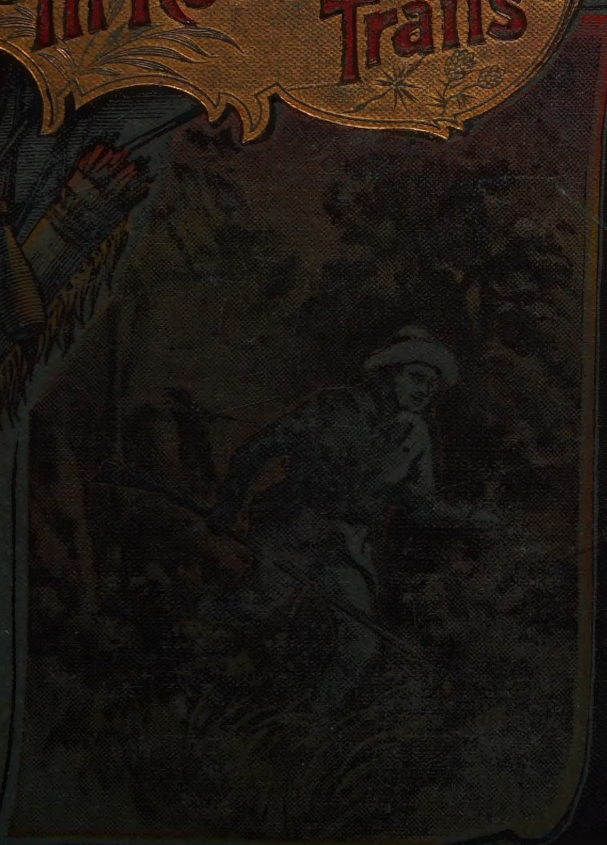




In Red Indian Trails



by E. S. Ellis



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IN RED INDIAN TRAILS

OR

OSCEOLA, CHIEF OF THE SEMINOLES

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

AUTHOR OF "PONTIAC," "SCOUTS AND COMRADES," ETC.

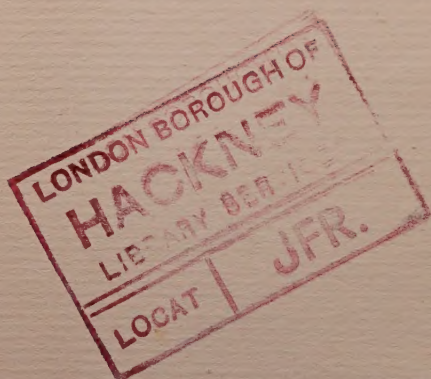


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OSCEOLA,

CHIEF OF THE SEMINOLES.

CHAPTER I.

WHITE MAN AND RED MAN.

ONE cool autumn day, in 1835, Ephraim Ashley, a scout in the service of the United States, was cautiously threading his way through that immense tract of trees, undergrowth, morass, and swamp, in which the St. John's River of Florida has its source, as it flows northward through lake and lagoon to its outlet in the northeastern corner, beyond the present city of Jacksonville.

The scout, armed with rifle, pistol, and knife, and clad in coarse, strong, homespun garments, had entered the country of the warlike Seminoles, who, it was rumoured, were plotting against the Government and scattered settlements, for causes that will be made clear later on. He had been through many scrimmages with the red men, from whom he knew it was idle to expect quarter,—a

fact so well understood that he felt warranted in reversing the rule, and it must be conceded that he had already carried it out in more than one instance of his varied career.

Eph wore a pair of heavy cavalry boots which reached half way to his thighs, and they were so excellent that though he had tramped through many miles of swamp and pools his feet were hardly moist. He would have cared little had it been the other way, but for the important service they rendered him in another respect. He was liable at any time to stir up the venomous serpents that often struck before he could leap aside, but their fangs were impotent against the leather armour, and he laughed as he crushed the reptiles at his leisure.

Eph knew he was engaged on one of the most perilous duties of his life. He was likely to meet one or a dozen Seminoles at any moment, unless he put forth extreme care and called into play all the wonderful woodcraft of which he was master, and which had made him the most valuable scout in the employ of the army.

The afternoon was still young and he was tramping noiselessly over a stretch of comparatively high ground, where there was less brushwood than usual, when he stopped as abruptly as if he had heard the well-known buzzing rattle of the *crotalus* in the path in front of him. It was nothing, however, of that

nature, nor did the keen gray eyes which flitted to the right and left, behind him, and even among the overhanging limbs, detect the first sign of man, beast, bird, or reptile, though all of them were plentiful in that section of the country.

What was it that had startled the veteran of the woods? Had he been called upon to explain, he would have said that it was a feeling that suddenly broke upon him, and which it would be fatal to disregard. Years before he had once laughed at this unaccountable hesitation, if not timidity, and the consequence was that he would carry a disfigurement on his face to his grave. He trifled no more with the warning of his good angel.

"It's one of the varmints," he thought to himself; "I don't know just where he is, but he's mighty near and means to draw bead on me, which the same being the fact, I won't overlook this convenient shelter."

He referred to a giant cypress, several feet in diameter, within arm's reach on his right. Its gnarled limbs were festooned with the delicate Spanish moss, some of which almost touched the ground, while the whole formed one of the most beautiful pictures to be found in the semi-tropical woods of the South.

When the scout made a move of that nature, he acted quickly. There was a single light, springy

leap and the thing was done. The notable fact about it was that if the point from which danger threatened was on either hand or to the rear, the trunk could afford no protection whatever: it was only the front that was guarded, and he felt not the slightest doubt that that was the direction from which the blow would come.

No more striking proof of his wisdom could have been given than that which came within the same moment that he leaped to shelter. The crack of a rifle broke the stillness and the bullet clipped off a piece of bark within a few inches of his face.

"I knew it," muttered the scout, on the alert. From a cypress, somewhat less in diameter than his own, and distant no more than a hundred feet, he saw the faint, blue wreath of vapour that revealed the point whence his enemy had taken a shot at him.

Now the reader will bear in mind that at the time of which we are writing repeating-rifles and breech-loaders were unknown. The guns were flintlocks and muzzle-loaders, which were used by our army as late as the war with Mexico. Consequently, when a man discharged his weapon he was defenceless until he could ram a second bullet home and pour powder into the pan of his gun, and that operation, even when the hunter was unusually expert, consumed a number of precious seconds.

And of course no one was more alive to the fact than Eph Ashley, who grasped a loaded rifle and held a vast advantage over his enemy. In the moment that he identified the spot whence the bullet had come, he sprang from behind the cypress and dashed on a rapid run for the other tree. Had his foe possessed a second gun, or had there been two hostiles, the move would have been fatal for the scout, but he knew what he was doing.

It may be said that the Indian who had fired and missed found himself confronted by an irresistible argument. It would never do to maintain his ground, and with his gun half loaded he whirled about and sped like a whirlwind through the wood, heading toward a deep stream, which was one of the numerous tributaries of the St. John's. He must have been aware of the fact, for he was more familiar with the section than the scout himself, but he did not swerve to the right or left, but bent all his energies to getting over the ground with all the speed possible, and that he was unusually fleet was proven by the fact that his pursuer could not decrease the distance that separated them.

Aware of this and fearing the fugitive would elude him, Eph halted abruptly and brought his gun to his shoulder. But it seemed as if a perverse fate was in his way that day, though it may have been that fate was kinder to him than he suspected.

With his attention fixed upon the Seminole who was fleeing, the pursuer could give no heed to his feet, his predicament being similar to that of the famous Captain John Smith of Virginia when retreating before the Indians. At the moment of bringing his gun to a level, he partly tripped and his aim was disarranged. The Indian at that time was dodging to the right and left to escape the shot which he expected every minute, but the flickering figure could not have eluded the unerring rifleman except for the mishap named.

The gun was fired, but the bullet nipped one of the branches a dozen feet above the head of the Seminole, who leaped high in air, emitted a yell, and speedily passed from view, still running in a straight course for the deep stream alluded to.

One of the ironclad rules of Eph Ashley's life was never to stir from the spot after firing his gun nor to do anything else until it was reloaded. He therefore paused on the instant, hurriedly poured out a quantity of powder from his horn into the palm of his right hand, leaned the barrel over and allowed the black particles to stream down the chamber. Then he whipped out the ramrod from where it reposed back of the barrel, and pounded wadding over the powder until the rod recoiled with a bounce from each blow. The spherical bullet was pressed more gently upon this, with enough wad-

ding on top to hold it in place, more powder was dashed into the pan at the stock, the flint was let down, the stopper pushed firmly into the neck of the powder-horn, and the rifle was loaded and primed, and it had required but a few seconds.

While thus occupied, the scout muttered more than one impatient expression, and it will be conceded that he had good reason for doing so, but he was by no means disheartened by the unexpected turn of events. He noticed the general course of the fleeing Seminole and did not think it likely it had been changed. At any rate the hurry of his flight left so plain a trail that it was easy to follow it.

But Eph Ashley was too experienced in the ways of the woods to overlook any important fact connected with this peculiar business. If he himself had been given time in which to reload his weapon, the same opportunity was presented to the Seminole, who, of course, knew the fact. Suppose he too had come to a halt, hurriedly recharged his rifle, and was now standing behind some convenient tree, sighting at his leisure and waiting for the white man to come within range ?

The peculiar intuition to which we have alluded did not remain with the scout. Its extent was simply to warn him of impending danger, after which it seemed to vanish as if its duty was done and the beneficiary must then depend on his own

resources. Eph, therefore, had now to rely upon himself for safe emergence from his peril.

This fact of necessity greatly handicapped him. It was useless to pursue his man unless he kept to the right course, and that could be done only by keeping the trail in sight. Sometimes the leaves and pine-cones were ruffled, then the soggy vegetation showed plainly; here the imprint was clear on a hummock, and then it stood out more distinctly where the Indian had dashed through a pool of water that looked as dark as ink.

While noting all this, the scout was on the alert for the gun levelled at himself. He glanced here and there, and in every direction, expecting to see the deadly weapon pointing like the finger of fate at him, followed on the instant by a sharp crack and the speeding of the bullet straight at his head or breast.

The commonest prudence suggested that inasmuch as the Seminole had fled before him and was removed as may be said from his path, the scout should draw off and leave him alone. He was in this section in pursuit of knowledge. It could be obtained by reconnoitring the Seminole settlements and watching the actions of the men, women, and half-breeds, including negroes, hundreds of whom, being runaway slaves, took refuge in the swamps and were welcomed by the Seminoles. This was

what the course of Eph Ashley should have been, and what had been his intention when he first penetrated the dangerous country, for the commanding-general impressed upon him that the information he sought was indispensable.

But the frontier scouts have never shown much respect for discipline, and when well clear of their own lines have followed out any whim that took possession of them. Eph Ashley could not forget that a wandering Seminole had tried treacherously to take his life, while walking peaceably through the woods. The insult was unpardonable, while his own exasperation was intensified by the aggravating slip he had made when on the threshold of success.

It should be added further that another motive impelled Ashley to his utmost exertions. At the moment his gun was discharged and the Seminole leaped into the air, he turned his head for an instant and glanced over his shoulder. It was done in a flash, but in that second Eph Ashley had a fair view of the dusky countenance and identified the fugitive.

"By gracious!" he muttered, compressing his lips, "I must shoot or make him prisoner, it don't matter much which. Would n't it be a feather in old Eph's cap if he could bring that chap into camp! Would n't General Thompson open his eyes? It would be a mighty big job, and I reckon the safer course is to draw a bead on the half-breed

and take his scalp. The Gin'ral will believe what I tell him."

The reflection nerved the scout to put forth every endeavour, and he advanced faster than was at all times prudent. Had the Seminole taken the plain course of reloading his gun, and then awaiting from cover the coming of the white man, the latter could scarcely have escaped, but it looked as if the warrior was intent only on putting all the distance possible between him and his pursuer, for the plainly marked trail showed that he was running with great speed.

Eph's pursuit was pressed until it terminated in a fashion that was a surprise indeed to him.

CHAPTER II.

DICK AND JACK.

IT so happened that on this same sunshiny afternoon in autumn two youths, about seventeen years of age, were making their way up the deep stream toward which the dusky fugitive fled in so much haste from the angry scout, Eph Ashley. The young men were Dick Moreton and Jack Raymore, and they were cousins. A singular conjunction of circumstances brought them together at this time and in this place.

The home of Jack Raymore was some thirty miles to the northward in the direction of St. Augustine, while that of his cousin was in this neighbourhood, where he lived alone with his father and a negro named Cato. These three formed the whole family, the father being a widower with no other children. Cato, like most of his race who made their homes in Southern Florida, was a fugitive slave, who came to the house one stormy night, wearied, in rags, and famishing with hunger. He admitted that he had fled from Georgia, and on the way had escaped recapture several times by the narrowest chance. Al-

though Mr. Moreton was opposed on principle to giving shelter to runaway slaves, he felt too much sympathy for the poor fellow to refuse him food and a bed. There was little risk in the act, which, as is well known, was a violation of law, for Cato was already so far from his State that his pursuit must have been given up long before.

So it was that the young, lusty, good-natured African became a member of the little household, where his great strength and willingness to labour made him valuable upon the small plantation, which, with its two horses, the same number of cows, and numerous pigs and chickens, and the product of the fertile earth gave a comfortable living to the owner and his boy.

Dick and Jack exchanged visits two or three times a year. The parents, as well as several brothers and sisters of the latter were living, and the two youths being of the same age and with similar tastes were very fond of each other. There was good hunting in the cypress region around the home of Dick Moreton, and it was one of the most enjoyable of treats for Jack to join him in a ramble through the wild section, they often being absent from the house for several days at a time. The country was more settled to the northward, and there was less hunting done when Dick returned the visits of his cousin, though two such bright, vigorous youngsters never

lacked the means of enjoyment and the most attractive kind of sport.

This pleasant interchange of calls, it will be borne in mind, prevailed when peace reigned in the peninsula of Florida. The Seminoles, mongrels, negroes, and half-breeds were encountered here and there through every portion of the country, but a man who treated them justly and kindly like Mr. Moreton never felt any fear of molestation from them. Often they called at his house and were never refused food and shelter, no matter how long they chose to stay.

But, all the same, the settler was never deceived as to a certain element of danger that always existed. He kept in touch with the sentiment of red men and white men, and foresaw the trouble which soon swept Florida with fire and massacre. He had been a soldier under General Harrison in the war of 1812, and none knew Indian nature better than he. Despite his uniform kindness toward the Seminoles and despite the fact that he had more than one true friend among them, he knew that when hostilities broke out no consideration would be shown to him and his by the treacherous members of the tribe, who, in accordance with the sad rule that obtains at such times, strike the innocent with the same mercilessness as the guilty.

Mr. Moreton and his son went on a visit to the

brother-in-law of the parent some days before the incident we have described. They were met by news of the most alarming nature. The Seminoles had absolutely refused to leave Florida, as they had been ordered to do, had defied the United States Government, and had taken the war-path. One of the most destructive of Indian wars had broken out, and no one but Providence could tell when it would end or how many lives must be sacrificed.

It did not take Mr. Moreton long to decide upon his own course. He determined to enlist and do his utmost to bring the recalcitrants to submission. Indeed, his military ability was so well known that he found the offer of a commission as captain awaiting him, and he accepted it on the same day that he reached the home of his relative.

But several important matters had to be considered and decided. There was his little home, near the head waters of the St. John's, with the domestic animals requiring attention. Besides, his house contained a number of valuables, mostly souvenirs of his dead wife, which he was anxious to secure. The Seminole war had not yet progressed so far that the parent would have hesitated to return to his home, except for the necessity of making his way to Fort King without an hour's unnecessary delay.

Jack Raymore said :

"Why not let me and Dick bring away what you want to save? It won't take us more than two or three days and will be a great treat for us; why, it's just the thing!" exclaimed the youth, with sparkling eyes.

"Of course; nothing could be better," added Dick, thrilled by the prospect of the outing, with its slight accompaniment of personal danger; "we shall soon be back, and I will stay here with Jack till the war is over."

The father was dubious. He looked inquiringly at his brother-in-law.

"What do you say, James?"

"I am not wholly satisfied, but perhaps it is the best thing to do; I am willing to let Jack go, if you are not afraid to trust Dick."

The plan was discussed for some minutes, the mother of Jack being strongly opposed in the beginning, but like most mothers who have sturdy, brave, and persevering sons, she was finally won over and gave her reluctant consent. So it was settled.

"You will probably find Cato there," said Mr. Moreton, "though there's no saying whether he will not join the rest of his race, who will make common cause with the Seminoles in the war. Tell him I wish him to stay on the plantation and look after the animals, though I don't suppose he will

give much attention to tilling the ground. He will be in no danger from those who are going to make war against our Government, but they may compel him to join them. It will be an odd turn of war's wheel," added the gentleman, grimly, "if Cato and I should take a shot at each other before this business is over."

"Would you try to shoot him!" asked his relative.

"I probably should, if I found him in front of me."

"Do you think he is true?"

"I *have* thought so, but he may be carried away by the madness which is no respecter of persons when the bullets whistle. Well, Dick, my boy, do your duty like a man. You and Jack will take your guns with you, keep a sharp look-out for danger, and if you succeed in reaching the house, collect the little things that are upstairs in my bedroom,—you know what they are,—tell Cato what I have said, and hurry back here, where I hope to join you before we are many months older, though only Heaven can tell whether we shall ever meet again."

Dick remained until after his father left for Fort King to join the force that was assembled there. The parting between father and child was affectionate and both shed tears; but the parent was hopeful that by prompt vigour on the part of the authorities

the revolt would be nipped in the bud. Alas, that he, like hundreds of others, should have made the sad mistake.

Thus it came about that the two cousins were making their way up the little tributary of the St. John's, their destination being the home of Dick Moreton near the swamp, still more than ten miles distant. When they first began their exchange of visits, the boys made use of a canoe, which Mr. Moreton purchased of a Seminole, but one of his tribe pilfered the boat, and Jack Raymore, with the help of his parent and two brothers, set to work to construct a craft to take its place.

This may be briefly described as a flatboat, or scow, a dozen feet long, about half as wide, and provided with a sail. There was generally a slight breeze of which advantage could be taken, but when that was lacking, they used a long pole. Under the most favoring circumstances their progress was slow and often quite laborious, but really that was a matter of indifference, since they were never in a hurry, and if overtaken by night it was no hardship to anchor in midstream or run ashore and sleep in the single heavy blanket with which the boat was generally provided. They always carried a day's supply of food, and while the boat started within a few rods of Jack Raymore's home along the main stream, it carried them to a point with-

in an eighth of a mile of the dwelling of Dick Moreton.

At the particular time we have in mind, the boys spent most of the forenoon in poleing the awkward craft up-stream, but while they were resting against the bank and eating their lunch a breeze sprang up and blew exactly right for them. They shoved out, after raising their sail, and seated themselves on the broad plank that crossed the stern of the boat just as it did the bow, there being no difference between the ends, and while Jack held the long, slender pole ready to use at any moment when it was necessary to keep the scow on its right course, his cousin sat beside him, and they talked in the aimless fashion of two youngsters similarly placed.

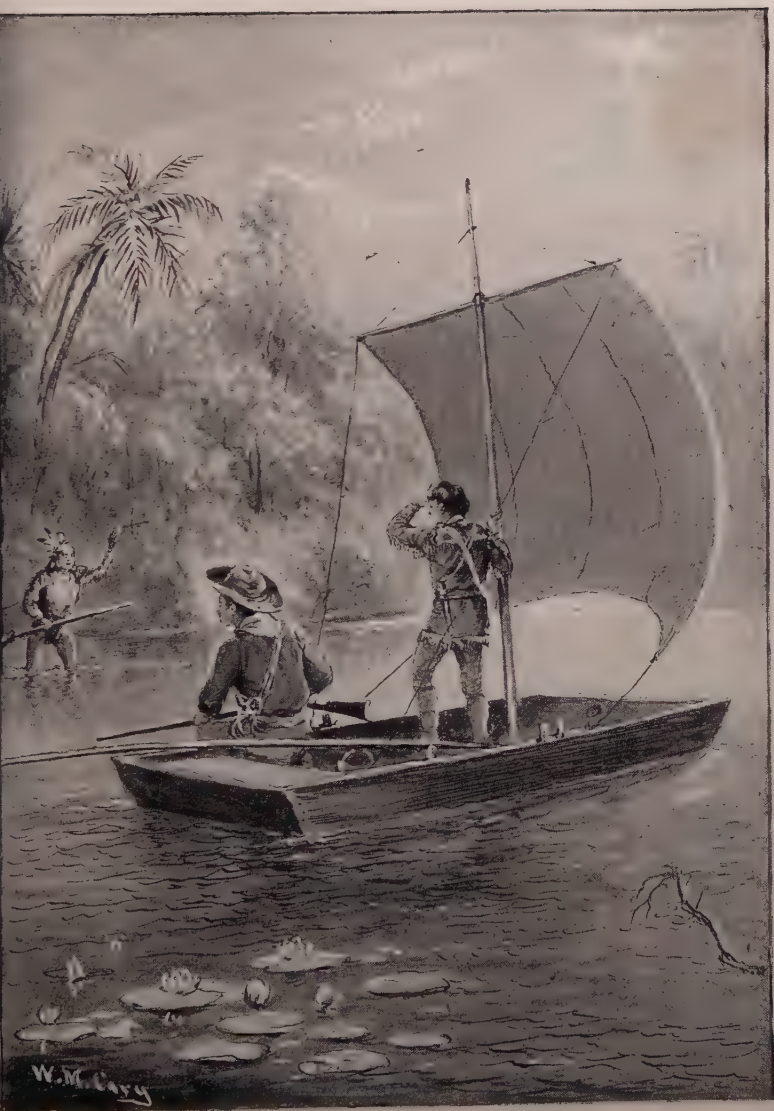
"Somehow or other, I have n't any fear of the Seminoles," remarked Jack; "all of them who live in this part of the country know us and know that Uncle Dick has always been a good friend to them."

"That's true, but father says a good many of them forget all that when trouble comes, and many of those who have sat at our table would be the first to swing their tomahawks over our heads."

"Well, we will take care not to give them the chance; we ought to reach your house to-night——"

"We shall easily do so if this breeze holds."

"There will be no risk in sleeping there, espe-



cially as Cato will be with us, and then, by pushing things, we can reach your home to-morrow night——”

Before the lad could finish his sentence, they were startled by the crack of a rifle from the woods on their left. Instinctively they glanced in that direction, neither speaking, but both peering and listening for the explanation of the sound, which after all ought to have caused them no special alarm, since hunters were liable to be encountered at any time in that part of the country.

But only a few minutes passed when a second report rang out, accompanied by a shout, nearer to them than the first report. Still wondering and silent, they were watching the shore, when the form of an Indian appeared amid the overhanging underbrush. He stood motionless a moment staring at them, and then stepping softly into the water and holding his rifle in one hand, began swimming toward them.

The first supposition of the youths was that he intended to enter the boat. There was no reason to refuse him permission, since the character of the two reports left no doubt that he was a fugitive fleeing from a foe. The Seminole swam with a powerful stroke, and, reaching the side of the craft, passed around the stern and came close to the gunwale on the farther side.

Jack Raymore extended his hand to give him help, suspecting he was wounded.

"No, no, no," said the fugitive in excellent English; "white man come after me—don't tell him—I hide—sh! you know me, Dick," he said, turning his black eyes upon young Moreton, who was attentively studying him.

"Yes," replied the boy; "I know you; we will take care of you; keep still and out of sight."

Hardly were these words uttered when Eph Ashley, who had dashed along the trail to the water's edge, burst into view.

"Helloa, younkers!" he called, after a glance at the boat, neither of whose occupants he had ever seen before; "have you obsarved a redskin swim across this stream?"

Dick thought it no violation of truth to reply:

"No; we have seen no one swim across."

"I say, you have n't got him in that boat, have you?" asked the scout suspiciously.

"What are you talking about? Come and look if you doubt; what should we be doing with an Indian? Have you lost one?"

"It looks very much that way; we had a shot at each other and then he made a break for this part of the world."

And the scout looked around and up and down and out on the water, as if he could find the answer

to his question in one of those places. Then he studied the ground where the trail of the Seminole disappeared near his own feet. Evidently he concluded that the fugitive had played a clever trick on him. Like a negro fleeing from a bloodhound, he had thrown his pursuer off the scent by taking to water. It looked as if the Indian had entered the stream and waded or swam as far as he had time, emerging at some point where it would be difficult to find his trail again. At any rate, as Eph viewed it, the red man had gone, and with the advantage he had gained it was useless to search any further for him. Dismissing him from his mind, he turned his attention to the two youths who were steadily gliding up-stream.

“Who are you and where are you going?” he called.

Dick Moreton took upon himself to enlighten him. The scout listened and shook his head.

“The best thing you can do is to turn round and go back as quick as you know how.”

“We mean to do that to-morrow.”

“Younkers, take my advice and do it at once; the varmints are on the war-path and you ’ll be lucky if you ’re able to get out as it is.”

“You seem to be in the same situation.”

“It ’s my bus’ness, and I reckon I know how to take care of myself.”

“ We hold the same opinion of ourselves.”

“ Like most young folks. Very well, do as you think best.”

And with this, Eph Ashley turned about and re-entered the wood from which he had come in such a hurry in pursuit of the Indian who had eluded him.

Waiting until he had been gone some minutes, Dick turned to the Seminole, who all this time was quietly swimming beside the boat.

“ Now, if you choose, you can climb aboard.”

“ Sh!” whispered the warrior; “ maybe he is watching.”

There was ground for believing the scout was not altogether satisfied with the words and action of the lads, and was slyly keeping an eye on them; but when ten minutes or more had passed and the distance was increased considerably, the Seminole turned his face toward the farther shore and struck out for land. He did not speak, and Dick and Jack watched him with no little interest. It was not far to the bank, and just before reaching it he dropped his feet and straightening up walked out. Even then he did not turn his head nor speak, but vanished almost immediately from sight.

“ Dick,” said his cousin, “ that Indian seemed to know you.”

“ Yes; he has called at our house several times;

I have hunted with him; we are old friends; who do you suppose he is?"

"I have n't the least idea."

"He is Osceola, the great war-chief of the Seminoles."

CHAPTER III.

THE SEMINOLE WAR.

THAT which is known in history as the Seminole war was probably the most remarkable series of events that ever occurred in America.

Now, as all my readers know, more than one great war has been caused by trifling events, but have you ever heard of a devastating conflict, costing millions of dollars and hundreds of lives that was produced by a single pronoun ? Incredible as it may sound, this was true of the Seminole war, which desolated Florida for seven years. Let me explain.

There was trouble with the Seminoles in 1817, which was summarily suppressed by General Jackson, but it was not to be compared with that which is now under consideration. East and West Florida was ceded to us by Spain in 1821. It was occupied by the warlike Seminoles, and as soon as we gained the country, the problem was how to get rid of the presence of these objectionable people. The Government decided to buy up their claims and remove them west of the Mississippi. Accordingly, a treaty was made with a number of the chiefs, by

which it was agreed to pay the tribe certain annuities and to protect them from all intrusion, while the Seminoles on their part pledged themselves to move westward at the end of twenty years.

Serious trouble soon appeared. The majority of the chiefs refused to sign the treaty and were bitterly opposed to the contemplated removal. A peculiar exasperation to the adjoining States has already been hinted. Scores of runaway slaves took refuge in Florida, where it was impossible to trace and recover them from the interminable swamps and dismal solitudes. The Seminoles welcomed the fugitives; they intermarried, and some of the Seminoles themselves were slaveholders, though they treated their bondmen very much as if they were equals and imposed slight labour on them. Thus Florida became a steady drain upon the slave property of Georgia and Alabama.

Our Government did not keep its promise to protect the Seminoles from intruders. Lawless rogues entered the country, stole cattle and committed innumerable outrages. Perhaps there was truth in the charge that the Government winked at this in the hope that the Indians would become so disgusted that they would willingly leave the country without waiting to the end of the stipulated period. The enraged Seminoles turned upon their persecutors and shocking crimes were committed on both sides.

The frightened inhabitants petitioned the National Government to remove their dangerous neighbours, and it was decided to do so.

But there had to be some regard for law and decency. A number of chiefs were brought together at Payne's Landing, where, May 9, 1832, a treaty was signed, by which the Seminoles agreed to relinquish all their possessions in Florida and migrate to the country allotted to the Creeks, west of the Mississippi. The removal was to take place within a few days, and President Jackson, who was determined that it should be effected, secured by some means the consent of seven chiefs to the agreement.

One of the conditions accepted by both parties was that the removal should not take place unless "they" were satisfied. Who was meant by the word "they"?

President Jackson insisted that it referred to the seven deputies who had visited the territory provided west of the Mississippi and with whom the agreement had been made, but Osceola and the majority of the chiefs were as insistent that "they" meant the whole tribe, after the report of the deputation had been made. Looking at the matter dispassionately, reason and justice seem to be on the side of the Seminoles, for there is no denying the fact that an overwhelming majority of the chiefs and the people themselves were opposed to the removal,

chiefly because it would place them near the Creeks, with whom there was a savage feud. It has been charged that the seven deputy chiefs were bribed. Be that as it may, two of them were killed by the other leaders because of what was looked upon as a betrayal of their trust.

Osceola, one of the remarkable war-chiefs of his tribe, was the hero of a dramatic scene when he and a number of brother chiefs met the agents of the Government to discuss the detested treaty of Payne's Landing. General Thompson carefully explained its provisions, reminded them that it had been signed by seven deputies appointed to act for the others, and that the agreement was binding, since "they"—meaning the deputies—were satisfied with its provisions.

The treaty lay on a table between the agent and the deputation of chiefs. The latter listened carefully to everything that was said, and then passionately declared that the understanding was that "they," meaning *all* the chiefs, were to be satisfied, whereas only a small part of them had signed the treaty, and the rest would never give their consent to removal from the land that had been their home for many years.

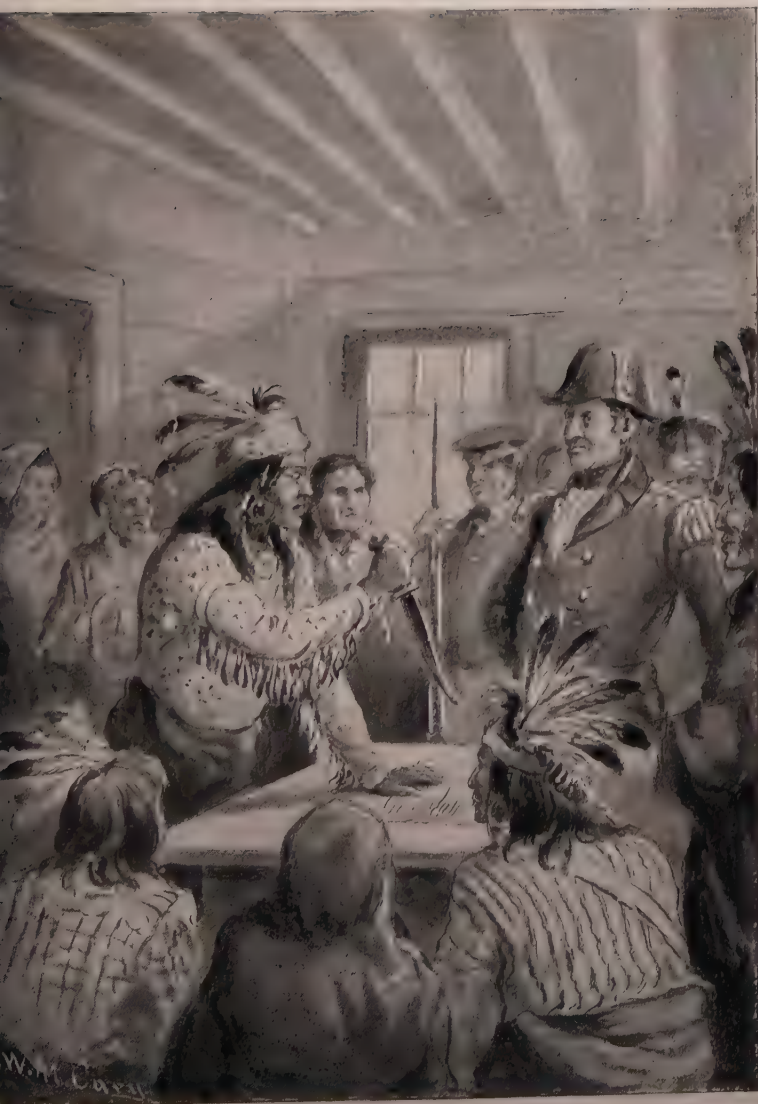
Since, as will be seen, everything hinged upon the interpretation of the intent of the single pronoun, the white officers were urgent in their interpretation,

and sought to give it emphasis by an intimation that their friend the Great Father (President Jackson) thought the same as they did, and would make sure that his view was carried out in spirit and letter.

All eyes were turned upon the scowling Osceola, who had not spoken. His opinion was desired and he gave it.

Striding forward to the table, he drew his hunting-knife while walking, raised it above his head, and brought it down with a vicious force that drove the weapon not only through the paper but clean through the top of the table on which it lay. "*That* is what I think of that treaty!" he exclaimed with flashing eyes, glaring around in the faces of the startled spectators, as he and his brother chiefs sullenly stalked out of the place.

General Wiley Thompson was the Indian agent. He was soon convinced that the Indians had no intention of migrating, and he called the leading Seminoles together in October, 1834. He wasted no words, but notified the malcontents that their removal had been determined upon and would be enforced. The reply of the Indians to this was to begin laying in stores of ammunition and preparing for the struggle. Some months later the leaders again met the agent, who read the message from President Jackson. This was an earnest appeal to them to live up to the terms of the treaty, closing



OSCEOLA AND THE TREATY.

with the assurance that only by doing so could they save themselves from the loss of many lives, their property, and humiliation and punishment.

This appeal was so forcibly worded that it divided the Indians, and a considerable number gave their consent to the removal. Osceola, however, was as defiant as ever. What particularly enraged him was that several of the chiefs who had promised to stand by him were won over. He could hardly restrain himself from attacking them in the presence of the agent, and, turning upon the latter, he charged him to his face with *taking* an unfair advantage of his people. By this time General Thompson was also angry, and he told Osceola that he was a treacherous dog who was misleading his people, and was their worst enemy instead of being the friend he pretended. The war-chief did not restrain his own opinion of the agent, who, losing all patience, ordered the arrest of Osceola. He was put in irons and kept thus for one night and a part of two days.

His confinement would have lasted longer, had not Osceola suddenly declared he was convinced it was useless to resist any longer. The general sentiment was against him, and he said he would sign the treaty and do all he could to persuade others to unite with him. General Thompson thereupon set him free, and Osceola went to Fort King with seventy-nine of his people—men, women, and chil-

dren—where he and a number of the warriors attached their names to the important document.

General Thompson was in high glee over his success in bringing the proud Osceola to terms. He wrote President Jackson that everything was satisfactorily adjusted and the removal would take place in due time. The threatened war-cloud had been dissipated.

But the agent was mistaken. Never was the burning wrath stirred to whiter heat in the heart of the war-chief than when he suffered the indignity of being placed in irons. He signed the treaty without the remotest intention of keeping it. He merely aimed to secure his freedom, and the opportunity to carry out his terrible purpose against General Thompson and the white people.

It seems to be the order of events in almost all our troubles with the Indians that when tact, judgment, and self-restraint are necessary on the part of the whites, the qualities are lacking. Agent Thompson had accomplished much in dividing the sentiment of the Seminoles; he had won over the majority of the leaders, and by a kind firmness he could have secured more. Personally he did his best to bring this about, but others committed outrages in which several Indians were beaten and killed.

As was inevitable, the Indians retaliated. During the summer of 1835, a mail carrier, riding from St.

Augustine to Fort King, was shot by Seminoles, and several dwellings in the neighborhood were looted. The outrages continued with slight intermission in different parts of the country, and often at points widely separated. The agent notified the Indians that the time had arrived for their departure for the West, and he was so confident that they would be on hand that he advertised their horses and cattle for sale. On the date appointed, not a single Indian presented himself. Osceola was doing his work well.

Several other alarming facts came to the knowledge of the agent. Osceola had killed one of the friendly chiefs, the Seminoles had abandoned all their towns, and, hiding their trails, had removed their families to a place of safety. The unprecedented fact about this action was that the Indians did this with such amazing skill that all the scouts and hunters attached to the United States forces were unable to trace them. It was a feat the like of which was never known before and has never been repeated.

These statements bring down the record to the time when we must give attention to the fortunes of the two youths who have already been introduced to the reader.

CHAPTER IV.

UP-STREAM.

ALTHOUGH Florida has within its borders the oldest city—St. Augustine—in the United States, it was a Territory at the time of the Seminole war, with a sparse population distributed mainly along the gulf- and sea-coast. There were military stations at different points, but the garrisons were comparatively weak and insufficient to subdue and hold in subjection the turbulent red men, who, through the appeals of Osceola, Macanopy, and other leaders, were roused to the highest point of fury against the settlers and the Government which was determined to force their removal to the Indian Territory beyond the Mississippi.

Florida, as everyone knows, is a subtropical country, which has become a favourite resort during the winter and spring months for invalids and pleasure-seekers from other parts of the Union. Its peculiar topography is too well known to be described. Among the animals found within its borders are the fox, squirrel, gray rabbit, otter, raccoon, oppossum, cotton-tail deer, gray and black wolf, black bear,

wild cat, and panther, while the serpents include five venomous species, with the rattlesnake at the head. In the dense swamps and forests one meets with numerous birds, some of brilliant and variegated plumage, and others of more sober dress. The list includes the whip-poor-will, cuckoo, paroquet, a tiny dove, the mocking-bird, blue jay, ground robin, log-cock, quail, cormorant, pelican, flamingo, crane, white heron, roseate spoonbill, fish-crow, ibis, wild turkey, carrion-crow, and buzzard, while the manatee, or sea-cow, is occasionally seen. In the southern portions are numerous alligators, with large numbers of sea-turtles and crabs, and a peculiar burrowing tortoise that is very destructive to vegetation.

Among the most pleasing trees and shrubs is the fragrant magnolia, so popular in the South. Its perfume, when softened by distance, is grateful, and the white flowers peep out from the other vegetation like flecks of snow. Should we attempt to give a partial list, it would be necessary to include many with which our readers are unfamiliar, the principal ones being the papaw, canella, caper-tree, linden, wild plum, mock-orange, satinwood, mahogany, torchwood, quassia, silver and red maple, redbud, mimosa, cocoa-plum, sassafras, mangrove, wild mulberry, wild fig, slippery and common elm, sycamore, sweet-gum, dogwood, rhododendron, holly, persimmon, hickory, hazel, black birch, sev-

eral species of pine, juniper, cypress, red cedar, yew, zamia or arrowroot, cabbage palmetto, saw palmetto, dwarf palmetto, and yucca. The castor-oil plant grows perennially.

Of late years Florida has become famous for its orange groves. Not only have fortunes been made by the cultivation of this delicious fruit, but many have been lost by the occasional frosts which destroy hundreds of groves in a single night.

Richard Moreton the elder was a native of Georgia, where he spent his youth and early manhood. He was still a young man when, after the close of the last war with Great Britain, he married a lovely bride in his native State. She was in frail health, and, in the hope that a change of climate would benefit her, he removed to the section near the head waters of the St. John's River. She improved for several years after the birth of her only son, Dick, when she finally drooped and died. Her loss was a sad blow to the loving husband, and so inclined him to solitude that he determined never to change his home, and the only friend with whom he was intimate was his brother-in-law, James Raymore, father of Jack, who was the chum of young Dick Moreton.

Because of his early associations, Moreton called his home his "plantation," though the name was not appropriate. He purchased a natural clearing

of a half-dozen acres, in the middle of which was erected the plain log structure in which he had passed the happiest and saddest days of his life. With the aid of the willing Cato, who came to him in the manner already told, and his strong, sturdy son, he turned the fertile soil to good account. He had moderate means when he went to that section, and supplemented the product of his plantation with the spoils of hunting, so that his circumstances were comfortable in every respect.

In Northern and Middle Florida cereals and root-crops, including oranges, grow abundantly, and in the section where Mr. Moreton made his home he raised sweet potatoes, oranges, and a considerable variety of semitropical fruits. In the few acres surrounding his humble dwelling could be seen growing Irish and sweet potatoes, tobacco, oranges, lemons, grapes, guavas, and a great variety of small fruits.

With his limited facilities, Richard Moreton constructed a better home than would have been supposed practicable. The house was of strong cypress logs, containing two rooms downstairs and the same number above. The structure was strongly put together and was furnished with plenty of windows, all of which, however, were quite narrow and small, for the builder could never forget that the time might come when it would prove very convenient

to have them too contracted to permit a full-grown man to climb through.

Such in brief was the dwelling toward which, on a pleasant autumn afternoon a good many years ago, the two youths were slowly sailing up a tributary of the St. John's in their small flatboat.

Jack Raymore was surprised when his friend told him that the Indian to whom they had given shelter for a brief while was Osceola, the famous war-chief of the Seminoles.

"I never suspected it," remarked Jack; "he did n't look like a chief."

Dick laughed.

"How do you think a chief ought to look?"

"I supposed he wore a showy dress and put on a great deal of style."

"Some of them do, but the taste of Osceola does not run that way. Although he is now wearing a good pair of moccasins, he has come to our house in his bare feet, and I suspect he goes that way most of the time. He wears leggings, a calico shirt, and several stained feathers in his hair, which hangs loose about his shoulders."

"Nearly all of the Seminoles do that; but he is not tall."

"No; his height is no greater than yours or mine, but he has tremendous strength, is very active, and I don't believe there is a braver man living."

"He is good looking," continued Jack, recalling the appearance of the remarkable man who won a place for his name on the pages of history. "His cheek-bones are not as prominent as most of his people's, his features are quite regular, and his teeth perfect,—but you can say that of every Indian I ever saw. Dick," added his companion gravely, "what do you think of what that white man told us?"

"You mean when he said the safest thing for us to do was to turn right round and get out of this part of the country as quickly as we could? Well, I think he was right."

"And yet we are going straight into the dangerous section."

"Because I promised father to do so; there are some things, you know, of mother's that he is anxious to get, and I am willing to run a good deal of risk to get them. But I have n't much fear; Cato is there, and we never made any enemies among the Seminoles."

"I don't doubt that every word you say is true, but you remember what your father said at our house last night when talking about that very thing: the first person that an Indian forgets when war breaks out is the white man who has been his friend."

"No one understands those people better than father."

“ Dick, what do you think about Osceola ? ”

“ I do not understand you.”

“ He is an old acquaintance of yours; you have hunted together; a little while ago we saved him from being shot by that white man who was pursuing him; now if Osceola through the fortunes of war gets us in his power, what will he do ? ”

“ I have asked myself that question a dozen times within the last half-hour. It seems to me that the chief is influenced by two strong motives. In the first place, I know that he feels gratitude toward anyone who has proven a real friend to him, but the all-powerful ambition with him is to defeat the Government in trying to drive him and his people across the Mississippi. The question is, which of these motives will prove the stronger if he is compelled to decide in our case? My answer is, I don't know.”

“ I shall do all I can to keep out of his clutches, so as not to put him to the test.”

“ Nothing could be more sensible. I suppose, Jack, you know that Osceola is not a full-blooded Seminole.”

“ I have heard that he was not.”

“ Indeed, he is hardly a half-breed by birth, but there is a strain of Seminole blood in his veins, and it is what they say about the leaven which leavens the whole lump. He is the fiercest Seminole between St. Augustine and Okeechobee; he hates all

white people, but if there is one whom he hates above all others, it is General Wiley Thompson, the Indian agent, who once put him in irons. You have heard of that. An Indian never forgets or forgives, and Osceola will manage in some way to even up accounts with General Thompson before he signs a treaty of peace. My father was so certain of this that he sent word to Fort King only a few weeks ago, begging General Thompson to be on his guard against Osceola."

"What did the agent say?"

"He sent his thanks to father, but said he was not under the slightest fear; Osceola was a coward and unworthy of a thought."

"What a mistake!"

While the boys were conversing the scow glided as smoothly forward as if over a summer sea. Never had they been more favoured by a breeze. The square sail and the shape of the boat made it impossible for them to do much in the way of trimming or beating, and the wind did not have to veer much to prove unavailable. But the course of the creek underwent little variation, and with an occasional use of the long, slender pole, which Dick held in his hand, he kept the craft near the middle of the stream, whose width was never more and not often less than a hundred yards.

The banks were lined with the dense vegetation

peculiar to the country, many of the trees leaning far over, so that when the youths looked up at the blue sky, it seemed that not much more inclination was required to cause the topmost branches to interlock and form an arch over their heads. Had not the breeze followed the course of the creek, the heavy vegetation must have shut it out altogether.

Seated at the stern, on the heavy cross-plank, with their guns lying at their feet, the boys idly glanced at the wooded shores as they smoothly glided to the rear and speculated upon what was likely awaiting them in the immediate future.

By and by there was a noticeable falling of the wind, but enough held to keep the canvas bellied and to cause the water to ripple aside from the prow. Everything was smooth, dreamy, and delightful, when a startling and unlooked-for interruption came.

Jack Raymore was almost as familiar with the course of the current as Dick Moreton. He pointed to the place, some distance in advance, where the stream made a slight bend in its course. At the point of greatest curvature a gnarled pine, twisted and misshapen, grew out from the bank almost horizontally for a full rod, when it curved upward like a sleigh-runner, ascending to a height of sixty feet, though the trunk remained askew and twisted, and displayed many scrubby branches.

" I always see something interesting in that," said Jack; " it struck me so the first time I saw it."

" I don't wonder," replied Dick, turning his eyes upon it, as a person will do, even though he has looked upon the object a hundred times; " but it has one attraction for me that it can never have for you."

" What is that ? "

" Osceola and I sat for more than two hours on that trunk last summer engaged in fishing, and neither of us got a bite."

" Did he become angry ? "

" Not half as much as I did; I expected to hear him say something impatient, but he only grinned and said the fish must have heard of me and kept shy; he is a strange—— "

Naturally while the boys were talking their attention was fixed upon the peculiarly shaped tree. Jack Raymore was studying it the more closely, while Dick's eyes were roaming along the bank on the left and the stream in advance, when his arm was suddenly grasped by his companion, who exclaimed in an excited undertone——

" There 's some person at the base of that tree and he 's waiting for us! "

CHAPTER V.

A SHOT.

BUT for the warning uttered by Eph Ashley the scout to the boys, and the general trend of their conversation, the exclamation of Jack Raymore would have caused little stir on the part of the two; but they were in the mood to be startled by sights and sounds which ordinarily would not have disturbed them.

Upon hearing the words of Jack, his companion turned toward the gnarled pine, looked intently at it for a moment, and then whispered:

“ I don’t see anyone.”

“ Nor do I, but I did a minute ago.”

“ What was it ? ”

“ You notice the thick clump of bushes at the base of the tree where it puts out from the shore? someone parted them with his hand, peeped out, and then drew back.”

“ You are sure, Jack, you were not mistaken ? ”

“ I could n’t have been; the man wore an old straw hat, but I did not see his face clearly.”

“ He must have been a Seminole; he may not

mean anything, but I am afraid he intends to take a shot at us."

"Had n't we better run the boat to the other shore?"

"No; the stream is so narrow that it won't take us out of range."

"But we shall offer him the best chance he can ask."

"We won't do that; I should like to make him think we suspect nothing, but it will be too dangerous for us."

The craft was well out in the creek, though unfortunately nearer the right bank than the other. While speaking Dick Moreton quietly lifted the pole from where one end was dragging in the water, and laid it at their feet in front.

"Now let's put the planks between us and him," he added in the same guarded undertone. He lay down in the bottom of the boat, so that nothing showed except the top of his head. Jack imitated him and each picked up his gun.

"The minute he shows his head, let fly at him; that is, if he seems to be aiming at us," whispered Jack; "we must n't take any chances we can avoid."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Jack the next instant; "the wind is driving us toward the tree; we shall run into it!"

The probability was alarming. Had the twisted pine been a hundred yards farther upstream the catastrophe feared must have occurred. As it was, while the craft was working toward the perilous point, it would fail to strike it. The danger appeared greater than was the fact.

"This won't do," said Dick, more restless than his comrade, who was frightened to see him lay down his gun, leap to his feet, catch up the pole, and leaning over the side of the boat press it against the muddy bottom, with the purpose of forcing the craft away from the right shore.

It was a daring thing to do, since it exposed him to a treacherous shot, for they were now within fifty yards of where the face and straw hat had been seen. Giving no heed to the action of his friend, Jack Raymore, lying flat in the bottom of the boat, pointed his rifle, with the barrel resting on the gunwale, at the base of the tree and breathlessly awaited the crisis in the strange situation.

He was not kept waiting long. The miscreant hiding there must have read in the action of the youths the fact that he had been seen and his purpose read, as well as the further fact that no better opportunity could be presented than was now offered to him. Again there was a movement among the undergrowth, and the alert Jack saw the barrel of a rifle thrust forth and aimed at them. The one thus



aiming was not wholly invisible, a portion of his headgear showing. Slight as it was, it was sufficient to locate him. There could be no doubt that he had levelled his weapon at the lad who was on his feet and bending all his energies to pushing the craft away from the dangerous point. Jack took the best aim possible, and, pausing hardly for a second, pulled trigger.

It was done in the nick of time, for within the same second the rifle of the one on shore was fired. With so slight a distance separating the parties, his shot must have proved fatal but for that of Jack, which anticipated it by an almost inconceivably brief interval of time.

An involuntary cry sounded from the undergrowth, and the next instant a furious threshing showed that the wretch who had been hit was making off at a headlong pace, as if he expected another and truer-aimed missile to follow him. Jack glanced up at his companion and asked in a scared voice:

“ Did he hit you, Dick ? ”

“ No; but he came mighty near it. I felt the wind against my cheek; your shot must have interfered with his aim.”

“ It looks so, but I ’m sorry mine was not better aimed.”

“ You did as well as you had a right to expect; you had n’t much chance.”

“ No; I only caught sight of the rim and crown of his straw hat; I aimed where I supposed his head was, and it looks as if I hit him.”

“ The yell he let out makes that certain; I think, too, he was struck hard; at any rate that particular Seminole won't bother us any more.”

When the flurry of the incident was over and the gnarled pine was left well behind them, Jack said:

“ That scout was right; we are running more risk than we supposed in coming into this section at this time.”

“ Do you think it best we should turn about? We can pole down-stream and be well on our way by morning. When we get into the St. John's, there will be little to fear from the Seminoles.”

Jack knew how much his uncle would grieve over the loss of the precious mementos of his dead wife; and, since he himself had been the most urgent to make this dangerous journey, he could not feel that it would be right to turn back.

“ No, let us push on; we have only a mile or so farther to go in the boat, and one night cannot make much difference either way; we will go to your house, and if Cato is there and says everything is right, we 'll stay with him until morning. Then we 'll lose no time in getting out of the region, and take good care to stay out until things quiet down.”

Not until the pine disappeared from sight around

another sweeping bend in the stream did the boys breathe freely. By that time the wind had so nearly died out that it produced no appreciable effect on the progress of the boat. Dick retained the pole, using it with a vigour that kept the awkward craft going at a better rate than it had shown for more than an hour. Jack soon insisted upon taking the pole, which his friend yielded with the remark that he was not in the least tired.

When the insistent youth had taken the stick he held it suspended for a minute or so, leaving the boat to glide forward under the impulse already given. Looking down at his comrade who had taken his seat, he quietly remarked :

“ Dick, I have a suspicion that the Seminole who fired at us was Osceola.”

“ I do not think so,” was the response. “ Osceola wears no headdress except the two or three stained eagle feathers, and you say this Indian had on a straw hat.”

“ It would have been easy for the chief to make the change with some one of his people who are in this neighbourhood. There is only one fact that makes me doubt.”

“ What is that ? ”

“ His gun was aimed at *you* instead of me.”

“ Because I offered the best mark; if it was Osceola, he would have taken me as soon as you, but

you can't make me believe it was he without bringing better proof than you have yet given." -

" Well, we shall know the truth before many days, and I am willing to wait."

With this Jack Raymore pressed the pole against the bottom of the stream, doing so at the bow of the boat and walking rapidly to the stern, with the upper end of the pole resting against his shoulder. He was thus compelled to travel the distance twice, but the task was not onerous, and he wrought with a vigour that speedily overcame the remaining distance.

While he was thus employed, Dick Moreton kept his seat at the stern, with his gun resting across his knees, his keen eyes roving along both shores. The alarming occurrence that had just taken place gave reason to fear that something of the same nature would be repeated. If there were more Seminoles lurking along either shore, they could not have asked a better opportunity than was presented; for it may be said there was not a rod that did not offer secure concealment and give them a chance to fire upon the youths, without the least fear of detection, and without a possibility of a return. In truth, had the miscreant who screened himself at the base of the pine been prudent enough to restrain the peep in which he indulged, and, even as it was, had not Jack Raymore providentially been looking

at the precise spot, he must have picked off one of the youths without any harm to himself.

As it was, Dick half expected the same warrior to return to the creek at some point above, and fire a second time under more favouring circumstances. That he failed to do so gave ground for hope that the shot which caused him to cry out and dash off was more effective than at first supposed.

"Well, so far, so good," observed Jack, as he ran the nose of the scow so hard against the shingle that it slid several inches up the bank and lifted the front of the boat clear of the water.

"Yes, our voyage is over for the present; I hope we shall be as fortunate in going back to-morrow; it will be a hard job, even though we shall have the current with us."

The two stepped out, and laying down their guns grasped the prow and pulled the boat farther out of the water. They had eaten all the lunch brought with them and they had no luggage with which to encumber themselves. They were lightly clad, for the weather, even in autumn, in that latitude, as is well known, is mild. They could have slept out of doors without a fire in comfort.

The sail was lowered, folded up, and laid to one side, the seams of the boat being so tight that not a drop of water worked its way through. Everything being snug, the youths turned their backs on the

craft and started for the house, hardly an eighth of a mile distant.

The course was over a well-marked path through the wood for a little way, when they debouched into the broad clearing which composed the "plantation" belonging to Mr. Moreton, who had gone to fight the battles of his country.

By this time the bright, sunshiny afternoon was drawing to a close. Night would soon close upon them, and they were a good thirty miles from the home of Jack, where only they could feel safe against the marauding Seminoles.

As the two emerged into the attractive, cultivated space, they faced the front of the log structure that had always been the home of Dick Moreton. At the rear was another building of plainer make, if that could be, which served as a shelter for the horses, cows, and other domestic animals, when the occasional storms made such protection desirable.

The youths paused and standing side by side silently surveyed the scene before them with peculiar interest. The place, as will be remembered, had been left in the charge of the African, Cato, and it was presumed he was safe from molestation by the Seminoles, who, however, were less likely to show respect to the property of his employer. Although Dick had not said as much, he partly expected to find the house a mass of smoking ruins,

and all the animals killed or stolen. Great, therefore, was his relief to note that, so far as he could judge, everything was as he and his father had left it a short time before.

And yet, in their apprehensive condition of mind, they saw cause for fear even in that promising fact.

Suppose a party of Seminoles had come out of the swamps and called upon Cato. He would tell them that his master and his young son had gone down the river on a visit and that both would return in a few days; for when Mr. Moreton left he did not know of the need of his services as a soldier, and his resolution to enlist was formed while in the house of his brother-in-law. Such being the fact, nothing was easier or more likely than that the Indians would secrete themselves in the dwelling and await the return of the two, who could be shot down as they came up the path to the front door. In truth, no matter what view was taken of the situation, it must be conceded that every possible advantage was on the side of the red men, who were free to carry out any treacherous scheme they might form, and with scarcely any risk to themselves.

CHAPTER VI.

STEPH.

“ I CANNOT see anything wrong,” remarked Dick, after he and his companion had stood for several minutes on the edge of the wood and looked across the clearing at the familiar house.

“ Nor do I,” said Jack; “ we may as well go forward. I wonder what has become of Cato ? ”

“ That is what I have been asking myself; he may be in the house, at the barn, off hunting, or in any one of a dozen places; let us not wait.”

Concluding that there was little cause for their misgivings the two resumed their walk, Dick slightly in the lead, as he felt was becoming, since it was his home. All the time they kept their gaze on the front of the dwelling, both actuated by a fear that they could not describe, but which probably was due to the nervous mood they had been in since the incident on the creek.

Probably twenty paces remained to be passed in order to reach the small covered porch which Mr. Moreton had placed there shortly after finishing his dwelling, when Dick abruptly paused.

"I saw it," whispered his comrade; "the door has been partly opened since we started across the clearing."

"Yes, it was pulled inward this minute; someone is inside."

The heavy structure, as was the fashion on the frontier, was provided with a latch-string, which was left hanging outside during the day, so that if anyone wished to enter he had only to give the cord a slight twitch. Both boys had their eyes upon this string, when they saw it shift slightly, caused by the lifting of the latch from the inside, and the door move backward perhaps six inches and remain stationary. It was inevitable that this was done by someone standing within, and it was equally certain that from his position he was watching the approach of the two youths.

The latter could not but feel uneasy. Each had a loaded rifle in hand and was prepared to use it, as they had already proven, upon the first demonstration of an enemy.

Their supposition was that the individual was a Seminole, who would attempt to make a lightning-like use of his weapon. If so, the lads were at an alarming disadvantage, since they were standing in the open, while their foe had the best kind of a screen.

Now took place a curious thing. Something

glistened at the edge of the partly opened door. The room beyond was in obscurity, but a shining spot was visible to both the watchers just above the latch. For a moment it was impossible to guess its nature, and then the explanation broke upon Dick and Jack at the same moment—it was the eye of a person who was cautiously studying them.

Hardly was the fact apparent when the door was drawn inward to its full extent, a burst of rollicking laughter rang out, and Cato the African stood grinning before them.

“ Gracious! yo’ scared me haf to def!” he exclaimed as he stepped across the threshold and upon the small porch. “ I ’se glad to see yo’ bofe.”

The boys were provoked as well as amused.

“ What do you mean by acting so idiotically ? ” demanded Jack.

“ Who ’s actin’ idoticamfully ? ” asked the negro in turn, his broad, dusky face immediately sobering.

“ Why, you; you saw who we were, and there was no need of your peeping at us as you did. Is there anyone else in the house ? ” asked Dick, feeling a sudden renewal of suspicion over the conduct of the servant.

“ Nobody in dere but me and I ’m out here; but, Marse Dick, I was skeered, and wanted to have a good look at yo’ afore inwiting yo’ in to spend de night wid me.”



"Have you had any visitors since we went away?" asked Dick as he and Jack stepped upon the porch and seated themselves.

"Nobody but Steph."

"Has *he* been here?" demanded Dick, angrily.

"Bein' as he war a wisitor ob mine, and dis am whar I lib, I s'pose it am de troof to say dat he *hab* been here."

"Father ordered him never to show his face on this place."

"Which, I s'pose, am de reason he comed," was the philosophical remark of Cato. "I reckon he must hab knowed dat Marse Moreton hab gwine away—why did n't he come back wid yo', Marse Dick?"

"He has joined the soldiers at Fort King and may not return for several months."

Dick Moreton regretted the words the moment they passed his lips, while Jack Raymore felt that a serious mistake had been made in telling the fellow; for, no matter how honest his intentions, he would make it known to some of the negroes or half-breeds who were always wandering through that section and with whom he was acquainted; but the mischief had been done and could not be undone.

All the mongrels sympathized with the Seminoles, and those who were well disposed towards the man

that had always treated them kindly would feel resentful because he had joined their enemies.

But who was the individual referred to as "Steph" ?

Many years before, when Mr. Moreton was living on his father's plantation in Southern Georgia, the servant of a neighbour deliberately took the life of another slave of whom he was jealous. Before he could be arrested and punished he fled to the swamps, escaped the dozen pursuers who were hot on his trail, and succeeded finally in reaching Florida, where all trace of him was lost and his crime was gradually forgotten.

While Mr. Moreton was sitting on his porch one afternoon, when Dick was about ten years old, a bedraggled negro came from the swamp and begged for food. It was given to him, for the gentleman never refused such an application; but while talking with the vagrant, something familiar in his face, voice, and manner caused him to question him. The result was the discovery that he was Steph, the runaway slave, who had slain one of his own race in Georgia a dozen years before. At first he strenuously denied his identity, but Mr. Moreton could not be deceived, and he finally forced the fellow to admit the truth.

Aside from the particular crime mentioned, Steph had been guilty of other misdeeds, and was a thor-

oughly bad fellow, whose flight and escape from capture caused more than one person to give a sigh of relief. Mr. Moreton, as stated, gave the applicant the food for which he asked, and then warned him never to approach his house or set foot on his place. The fellow gave his promise, but went off sullen and muttering to himself.

Steph was the only person in Florida with whom Mr. Moreton had ever exchanged an angry word. He thoroughly detested the scamp, and meditated sending word to his owner of his whereabouts. But he did not believe Colonel Walters would take the trouble to come for him, nor could Mr. Moreton convince himself that it would not be an injury to his old friends to have the ruffian again among them. So in the end he did nothing.

But he was provoked by a well-founded suspicion that Steph, who was stoop-shouldered, very tall, active, and strong, was often in the immediate neighbourhood ; that he stole his chickens and other property, and was doing what he could to corrupt Cato, who had less strength of mind and was easily persuaded to act against his own interests.

Having given these facts, the indignation of Dick Moreton will be understood when Cato coolly told him that Steph had made a call upon him during the absence of his employer and in the face of his prohibition.

"When was he here?"

"He dropped in yesterday afternoon and stayed to supper."

"Did you invite him?"

Cato threw back his head and broke into uproarious laughter.

"Gorrynation! Yo' doan' hab to inwite Steph; he inwites hisself. I t'ought I 'd gib him a gentle hint, so I said, said I, 'Steph, yo' cl'ar out as quick as yo' kin trabbel,' but he did n't took de hint kindly. Mebbe it warn't plain 'nough."

"He could n't mistake the words if you really uttered them," said Dick, coldly, suspecting that Cato had been influenced by the fellow to deceive him.

"Dem 's de wery gentle words dat I spoked, but la! I might as well hab spoked 'em to de hosses or cows or pigs, fur all de good dey done. I dropped anoder hint to de 'fect dat I war lookin' fur Marse Moreton ebry minute, and if he arrove while Steph war hangin' round, he would ax him to go, but afore doing it he would shoot him frough de head and bofe feet."

"What did he reply to *that*?" asked Jack Raymore, who was always amused with Cato.

"Drowed his cheer up to de table and eat more stuff dan I could swaller in a week! *Dat's* de sort of gemman dat Steph am."

“ Did he give any hint of when he would be likely to call again ? ” asked Dick.

“ He said—no; he did n’t say nuffin,” replied Cato, interrupting himself so abruptly as to throw suspicion on his words. Dick noticed it, and was about to question him more closely, when he decided to adopt another course.

“ Cato, you heard me say that my father has gone to join the soldiers who intend to drive the Seminoles out of Florida ? ”

“ If I disremember right, yo’ made some observation which might be made to mean sumfin’ like dat.”

“ Well, I want you to take particular care not to tell Steph or any of these Seminoles or half-breeds that you meet what I said.”

“ I ’ll do dat, sartin suah! I ’ll let ’em b’leve dat Marse Moreton am expected back ebery day. Dat ’ll be a big idee,” added the African, pleased with his own brilliancy; “ for yo’ see dat as long as Steph am lookin’ fur Marse Moreton he ’ll fight shy ob dis place, whereas and likewise, if he b’lebes he am liable to come any hour he ’ll snoke off.”

The incident itself was of little importance, except as to its meaning of what lay behind it. While Cato was honest and loyal by nature, the youths were sure he had been influenced by the evil Steph, and perhaps by some of the half-breeds and Semi-

noles, among whom he had considerable acquaintance. Dick was confirmed in the wisdom of their leaving at an early hour in the morning and staying away until all danger passed.

After the chores were finished and they had eaten the excellent meal provided by the servant, Dick told him that he and Jack were going away on the following day, and they were uncertain when they would return. The place would be left in charge of Cato, who would receive a liberal reward from his employer for his faithfulness.

It was comparatively early in the evening when Dick lit a common dip candle and led the way upstairs to the room which he and his friend were to occupy for the night. Before retiring he passed into his father's apartment and opened the chest which stood in one corner. While Jack held the light, the other carefully took out the souvenirs which were more precious to his parent than anything in all the world. There was the plain gold ring that had been presented to the beautiful woman before she became a bride; a piece of fancy needlework given by her to her future husband; and, most precious of all, a small painted portrait on ivory of the young wife. It was an exquisite work of art. The mother had died when Dick was so young that he held only the most shadowy recollection of her.

With the portrait in one hand he sat down on the

floor, while Jack lowered the light and both were silent. For a long time the son gazed on the face, his comrade sympathizing too deeply with him to speak; but Jack had looked upon the likeness before, and what specially impressed him was the wonderful resemblance that Dick bore to his dead mother. There was the same symmetrical oval face, the Grecian nose, the golden, curly hair, and, above all, the expression of the deep-blue eyes, whose depths betrayed a beauty which cannot be described, but which the artist had caught with remarkable skill.

Finally, with a sigh, Dick carefully wrapped up the mementos in a package of paper and thrust them into the inner pocket of his coat. Then the boys disrobed, knelt down for a few minutes in prayer, blew out the light, and stretched themselves upon the bed, the same as they had done many a time in the past.

But neither could sleep. The incidents of the day, the misgivings concerning the future, and possibly the effect of the reminders of the dim, sad past may have been the cause. Each supposed the other after a time to be unconscious, but a word from Jack told him that his companion was as wide awake as himself, and it was not long before both were thankful that such was the fact.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOTTERS.

EVERYONE knows how trying it is to be unable to fall asleep at the time he has been accustomed to lapse into unconsciousness. The tossing back and forth, the many changes of position, the deep sighs, the resorts to all the plans which one can recall to woo gentle slumber, with the result of complete wakefulness that seems to become more pronounced as the lagging hours drag by,—all this is a test of one's endurance and patience from which it is safe to say everyone shrinks.

Such was the experience of Dick Moreton and Jack Raymore, after lying down on the bed in the upper room of Mr. Moreton's house. They were comfortably tired, but their remembrance of what they had passed through on the voyage up the stream and the certainty that a great danger impended threw them into a nervous state that drove away all desire for slumber. It was impossible to sleep, and both knew it.

The night was mild and starlit. The rays of the round full moon, shining in an unclouded sky, pene-

trated the narrow window near the head of the bed and were scattered over the bare floor and their plump, muscular limbs. The stillness was profound.

"It 's no use," suddenly exclaimed Jack, flinging off the blanket, which covered one foot; "I can't sleep a wink."

"Nor can I," replied his companion with equal impatience; "we may as well get up and dress ourselves."

"I tell you what we will do," added Jack, struck by a new thought; "let's slip out of the house and start down-stream."

"Why not wait till morning?"

"What 's the use? The danger will be greater then; we can reach the river before daylight and be well on our way by sunrise."

Dick lay still for a minute or two thinking over the proposal.

"I 'll do it; we won't tell Cato anything about it, but sneak off, and by the time he learns we are gone we shall be a goodly number of miles on our way. Cato means well, but he tried to deceive us awhile ago; he 's under the influence of that ruffian, Steph, and we shall be putting ourselves in his power by staying here until to-morrow; be careful to make no noise."

As he spoke, Dick stepped carefully out on the floor, quickly followed by his companion. Although

lucifer matches had not generally come into use at that day, Mr. Moreton had provided his home with the little conveniences, which, however, were far more awkward and sulphurous than those now in use. Dick was on the point of lighting the candle, sitting near on a chair, when he reflected that the light might attract the attention of Cato who had not yet come up-stairs, it being his habit to sleep in the bed of his master or that of his son during the absence of either.

“ We don’t need the candle,” whispered Dick; “ the moonlight will serve.”

It took but a few minutes to complete their toilet. Their guns, ammunition, and everything they needed were in the small apartment, whose door, communicating with the head of the stairs, stood open. All that was necessary was to get out of the house without being observed by the servant, although even that was not really required, since there would seem to be nothing to fear from him.

At the moment Dick was on the point of leading the way down-stairs, both heard the murmur of voices on the porch. They stood still and listened.

“ Cato has company,” whispered Dick, laying his hand on the arm of his friend, as a warning for him to remain quiet.

“ Sh! he ’s coming up-stairs; what shall we do ?”

The question was caused by the heavy tramp of the negro as he came through the open door below and approached the foot of the stairs. Instead of going up, however, he paused, and, looking upward in the gloom, called in a husky voice:

“Helloa, Marse Dick!”

Before the youth could reply, Jack placed his hand over his mouth, and leaning over said in an almost inaudible undertone:

“He wants to find out whether we are awake.”

Cato listened a moment and then repeated the call, to which it hardly need be said no response was made, the boys standing motionless and listening. Then the negro called a third time in a still louder voice, but his attentive ear detected only the deep, regular breathing of the lads, who played their part well.

“Hooh! dey ’s sound asleep,” remarked Cato, shuffling across the floor to the outside, where in the stillness he was heard to resume his seat near his visitor. The pungent smell of tobacco was brooding in the air, and with the mild weather all the doors and windows were open.

“Sure ob dat?” queried a gruff voice; “mebbey dey ’s playin’ ’possum.”

“Wharfur dey do dat?” was the pertinent question of Cato. “Dem younkers sleep like logs; I knows ’em.”

"But we must n't speak too loud," admonished the visitor. Cato did not seem to take kindly to the instruction of the other.

"Doan' yo' 'spose, Steph, I has some sense? Yo' acts as if I war as big a fool as yo' am yo'-self."

Dick pinched the arm of his chum. The remark of Cato had identified the caller: he was the vicious Steph, that had dared to return to the house while the son of the owner was inside.

The boys advanced to the head of the stairs and gave close attention to the words of the two, every syllable of which was clearly audible in the profound stillness and with not a closed door or window intervening.

"Marse Dick is pow'ful mad 'cause yo' been here, Steph," said Cato, after they had smoked a brief while in silence.

"What do I keer?" asked the other contemptuously. "I 'm gwine to come jes' when I pleases widout axin' Marse Moreton."

"He hab a bad temper when he gits mad; better look out."

"Hain't I tole yo' I don't keer fur him no more dan I keers fur Colonel Walters way off in Georgy? I reckons when Marse Moreton comes back, he won't know whar to look fur dis house, eh, Cate?" said the visitor with an odd chuckle.

“ What ’s de use ob burnin’ de house down, Steph ? What ’ll become ob *me* ? ”

“ Yo’ kin jine de Seminoles and de rest ob de folks; dey ’s gwine to clean all de white trash out ob Florida from one end to de oder. Dey ’d skulp yo’, Cate, if it war n’t for me.”

This assertion evidently scared the younger man, for there was a perceptible quaver in his voice when he asked :

“ How dat ? ”

“ Osceola and de oder chiefs said de only ting to do war to shoot Marse Moreton and Marse Dick and sarb his nigger de same way.”

“ What dey want to skulp me fur ? ”

“ ’Cause you b’long to Marse Moreton and would be apt to stick by him.”

“ I would like to stick by him, but what ’s de use if I losé my skulp ? What did yo’ obsarve to Osceolar ? ”

“ Dat jes’ what I said,—dat yo’ war true blue.”

“ I ain’t true blue,—Ise true black.”

“ All de same; I said I had talked wid yo’ a good many times and when eberyting was ready yo’ ’d jine de Seminoles dat is fightin’ fur dere huntin’-grounds and homes.”

Cato smoked a little while in silence. There could be no doubt that he was much disturbed by the words just spoken to him, and was overawed by

the personality of the African seated opposite, smoking his pipe. Suddenly Cato asked:

“ Steph, how did yo’ git yor arm hurt ? ”

“ It ain’t hurt much—jes’ a scratch,—dat ’s all; I was crawlin’ ober a log when my gun cotched in one ob de limbs and it went off and de bullet scraped my shoulder.”

“ When was dat ? ”

“ Dis afternoon; pshaw! de hurt doan’ ’mount to nothin’; I did n’t even tie it up, and it ’ll be all right in a day or two.”

This time it was Jack who slyly pinched Dick. The two now knew who it was that fired the shot at Dick Moreton from the base of the gnarled pine.

“ Should n’t be so keerless, Steph; next time mebbey yo’ won’t be lucky ’nough to hab de bullet graze yo’ shoulder or hit yo’ plum’ in de head.”

“ What yo’ mean by dat ? ”

“ If it hit yo’ in de head, ob course it ’ll glance off, but it ain’t likely to do dat, as I jes’ said.”

“ When am Marse Moreton coming back ? ” inquired Steph, ignoring the joke at his expense.

“ Doan’ know.”

“ What did young Dick say ? ”

“ His fader hab gwine to Fort King to help de sojers drive de Injins and colored folks out ob Florida; he tinks he ’ll be back in a few months, but it

may be a yeah, and like 'nough he won't come back at all."

But for the obscurity of the room, Jack Raymore would have seen the handsome face of his companion flush with anger at hearing these words. Despite the orders to Cato to conceal the cause of the parent's absence, the servant had revealed the whole thing upon the first question. It was done, too, with such readiness that the son felt an increase of distrust of the fellow.

It was clear that the information produced a marked effect upon the listener, who was heard to shift his position and mutter an imprecation.

"I knowed Marse Moreton was mean 'nough to do anyting, but I did n't tink he 'd quit heah to do dat."

"Why not?"

"'Cause he can't tote his house and barn and hosses and cattle wid him, and when he comes back, if he eber does, which I doan' b'leve he will, dey won't be waitin' fur him."

"I guess he oexpects dat; darfur he ain't worry-in'."

"But he oughter knowed better dan let Marse Dick come back, after Marse Moreton had gwine to jine de sojers."

"Yo' doan' s'pose Marse Dick gwine to stay heah, do yo'?"

"He am heah now, ain't he?"

"But he 's gwine away in de mornin' afore sun-up."

"Yo' mean he 's gwine to *start*," was the significant remark of the miscreant; "but I doan' tink him and dat oder boy will git wery fur on de road."

"Why not?" asked Cato, who it was evident was alarmed by the hints which his companion kept dropping.

"Dar boat will be apt to run agin' sumfin' afoah dey gits to de riber; Osceola ain't doin' any sleepin' dese times; I doan' understand how dem younkers got frough to-day."

Dick Moreton leaned over so that his mouth was close to the ear of his companion and whispered:

"We do."

At this moment it seemed to dawn upon Cato that he had committed a grave indiscretion in making known the facts about Mr. Moreton.

"I forgot dat Marse Dick gib me strict orders not to let yo' know anyting 'bout how Marse Moreton had gwine to jine de sojers."

This remark, evidently as honest as it was stupid, served to restore the servant to the confidence of his young master, so far as loyalty of feeling was concerned. He had revealed his secret through no evil purpose.

"Cate," said the other, lowering his voice so that

his words were hardly audible to the listeners; "if dem younkers am asleep, what 's de use ob waitin'?"

"Waitin' for what?" asked Cato in turn, failing to catch the fearful meaning of the question.

"Pshaw! Yo' knows what I mean; dey am asleep; what 's de use ob dar waking into a world dat am full ob trouble?"

"None ob *dat*!" warned Cato with more resolution than he had yet shown; "I 'll neber stand by and see dem hurt while I kin stop it."

"Wal, we won't quarrel ober it now; Osceola will 'tend to dem. Dar's a little breeze, Cate, dat blows frough dis doah; s'pose yo' shet it fur awhile?"

Cato promptly acted upon the suggestion, and the further words of the plotters became indistinct. A minute later Dick whispered:

"Now 's our time, Jack."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUGOUT.

NOTHING could have been more providential than the closing of the outer door, which brought the youths the very opportunity for which they were waiting. They had overheard enough to give them the full details of the wicked plot formed by the negro Steph, and it was impossible for them to leave the neighbourhood too soon.

It must not be supposed, however, that while they were anxious to steal off without detection, they believed themselves to be in special danger at the time. Cato was friendly, and, though he might hesitate to take any part in the impending affray, he was certain to do nothing against the boys, even at the command of the companion who held an overpowering influence over him. It followed, therefore, that the lads had only one enemy to think of. The two were well armed, brave, and cool-headed, and had Steph tried to stop them, or to offer violence, he would have been the most likely one to suffer. He had already received the worst of one encounter where the advantage was strongly on his side, and cowardly as he was by

nature, he would have shrunk from another hostile meeting with the lads.

Nevertheless, a great deal was to be gained by the stealthy flight they had undertaken. It was still comparatively early in the evening, and, if they could leave the place undetected, they ought to be well on their way by sunrise, and it was because of this fact that they neglected no precaution in descending the stairs to the lower floor.

Dick took the lead and went down the few steps in perfect silence. All stairs have a way of creaking at night, and both were in dread that they would thus be betrayed. The very last step did give out a sound that was alarmingly loud in the stillness. They halted and listened. The murmur of voices was still audible and the strong odour of burning tobacco reached them, but the closed door which deadened the words helped to subdue all other sounds, and a moment's listening satisfied the boys that so far their flight was unnoticed.

The moonlight streamed through the front window, but its illumination was not necessary to Dick and Jack, who were familiar with every inch of the interior of the dwelling. They remembered where the table and chairs stood and readily avoided them, until Dick, still in the lead, gently lifted the latch of the back door, and with the same absence of noise drew it inward.

The moonlit clearing, the barn, and the growing vegetation stood revealed almost as clearly as if the sun were shining. Neither spoke, for there was no need of it; each knew what had to be done, and did it. When both were outside, Dick for the first time spoke in a guarded undertone:

"They will remember that this door was closed, and it won't do to leave it open."

With which he gently drew it shut and slipped the latch in place. Despite his care it emitted a sound which on the instant caused them to believe their flight had been detected. Both stood motionless, grasping their guns and ready for what might come.

"I heerd somefin'," said Steph, his words plainly audible because of the increased loudness of his voice.

"I did n't; what did it sound like?"

"Dunno, but it war inside dere."

And to the dismay of the youths, the outer door was opened, and, though they could see nothing, they knew both Africans were peering into the room.

"Who dar?" called Cato in a husky voice, and, receiving no reply, he added:

"'T warn't nobody, 'cause if it war, he 'd come round to de front doah."

"Go look," commanded Steph.

"Go look yo'self; I 'm tired."

"All right; if yo' 's satisfied I am; shet de doah to keep out de draught."

Once more the front door was closed and the boys were free to continue their stealthy flight, which they did with such care and promptness that they were soon at a safe distance from the dangerous spot. It was easy to keep the house between them and the plotters at the front, and when they had passed beyond the barn, they felt free to throw aside much of the caution they had used.

By a circuitous course, they came back to the path that had been followed in the afternoon, and which led to the creek, where they had left their boat that had served them so well in coming from the home of Jack Raymore. They were in good spirits over the success of their stratagem.

"Unless Cato takes a look into our room when he goes to bed," said Dick, "he won't learn anything about our flight for a long time to come."

"But it seems to me it will be natural for him to take a peep through the door which we left open when we should have closed it. Will Steph stay all night in the house?"

"I do not think so; his home is not far off, and he will go there. Even if Cato does find we have gone away, I am sure he won't tell Steph before to-morrow."

"Meanwhile, Steph will gather some of his

friends, including a lot of Seminoles, and they will be watching the shore for us. If no slip occurs, he and they will find that they have been fooled."

"Well, if that does n't beat everything!"

"What 's the matter?"

"Our boat is gone! This is the very spot where we drew it up on the bank, but it is n't here."

Such was the fact. There could be no mistaking the exact place. Since there was no tide at this distance from the sea, and no disturbance of the current had taken place, it was self-evident that someone had removed the scow.

"It must have been Steph," said Jack, when they had stood a minute peering round in the gloom.

"I am not sure of that; if he intends to ambush us along the stream, I don't understand why he should go to the trouble of stealing our boat. It looks to me as if some of his friends had been at work since we were here."

"It may be somewhere near; let's search for it."

They separated, one going up- and the other down-stream. Within three minutes Jack emitted a low whistle as notice that he had made a discovery. His comrade hastened to his side.

"It is n't our boat, but it will serve as well."

He had come upon a dugout, that is, a log that had been hollowed out and shaped into a fair resemblance of an Indian canoe. Inside lay a long

paddle with a broad blade, and the craft was sufficiently buoyant to carry several persons. So long as there was no wind to help them, the smaller boat was preferable to their own.

But to whom did it belong? Was it the property of Steph or of some Seminole prowling in the vicinity? If an Indian warrior was the owner, where was he at that moment, and was there more than one dusky enemy to be feared?

These and similar questions were asked but not answered during the few minutes that Dick and Jack stood in the shadow and looked down at the dugout, peered into the gloom, and listened for evidence of enemies near them.

Could they have found their own craft they would not have disturbed the other whose ownership was in doubt. The silence was unbroken, and the boys were in a greater quandary than would be supposed, for the reason that reflection convinced Dick Moreton the new boat was the property of some Seminole.

"If it belonged to Steph," he said, "I should have seen it before, for you know he has lived a good many years in our neighbourhood, but this is the first time I have ever placed eyes on the dugout."

"The best thing we can do is to borrow it."

"What is troubling me is the chance that the

owner may come back in a few minutes and, finding his boat gone, he will search for it, suspecting who it is that has taken it away. He may call others to his aid, and we shall be followed before we can get a half-mile from here."

"He would learn the same thing if we had taken our own boat; it seems to me we have no choice left."

"You are right, and nothing is to be gained by waiting."

Dick stooped down and shoved the dug-out clear of the shore. The water there, as in most places, was quite deep near land, so that when the two adjusted themselves in the unsteady craft it floated freely. Jack seated himself near the front, while Dick, who had taken up the paddle, balanced the boat by placing himself a little beyond the centre and nearer the stern.

Both boys were experts in using the paddle, which was handled in the Indian fashion, that is to say, he faced the front of the craft and dipped the implement first on one side and then on the other. He could thus see, when the circumstances were favourable, where he was going, instead of being compelled to look over his shoulder, as an oarsman has to do. His rifle lay in the bottom of the boat in front of him, but Jack held his weapon firmly grasped, so as to be ready to use it at a moment's warning.

Above all things, it was necessary that the swaying of the paddle should give out no noise. No ears are sharper than those of the American Indian, and a ripple that would be unnoticed ordinarily has often given the prowling red man the very clue for which he was seeking.

In one respect the vivid moonlight was a disadvantage, for the orb had now climbed so far up the sky that it illuminated most of the stream almost as brightly as day. Dick would have preferred to cross to the other shore, which he believed was not so closely watched, but for most of the distance the moonlight struck it so directly that there was not so much as a ribbon of shadow of which to take advantage. A pair of keen eyes, peering through the undergrowth on the edge of the creek, could not fail to observe the boat and its occupants stealing along the other side. So, perforce, the lad kept close to the bank that was on the same side as his home, putting forth all the skill of which he was capable.

Even with this help his situation became extremely perilous at times, for the winding course of the stream and the occasional breaks among the trees and vegetation compelled him to cross the bands of moonlight, where he was in plain view of anyone who might chance to be looking in that direction.

There was one decided advantage, however, which they lacked when following the opposite course: the current was in their favour, and at the upper part of the creek it possessed considerable force. Had the youths merely drifted with it, they would have progressed a long way before daybreak, but naturally they were eager to place as many miles behind them as possible while the darkness favoured.

With every rod their hopes rose. They knew that danger lay in front, and indeed they would not be clear of it until they reached the home of Jack Raymore, where the town was so strongly fortified that no one held the Seminoles in fear; but there could be no doubt that the Indians intended to attack the home of Mr. Moreton, slay him and his son, drive off or kill all his live stock, and burn the buildings. That was the kind of warfare adopted by the mongrels and which prevailed for years through summer and winter in the Floridas. It was natural, therefore, that the boys should believe that the peril most to be dreaded was behind them, and the farther they got from it, the nearer would they be to safety.

Dick Moreton guided the dugout for a half-mile with a skill that no Seminole could have surpassed. Half seated and half reclining at the prow, with his gun firmly held in both hands, while he strove to penetrate the gloom that was ever opening before

them, his cousin scarcely heard a sound of the paddle that was dipped first on one side and then on the other. Now and then he caught the drip of a few drops and occasionally there was a ripple so faint that it could not have disturbed the ear of an Indian listening a dozen feet away.

Dick hugged the shore as closely as he could. Jack often felt the cool, soft touch of the leaves of an overhanging limb as they gently brushed like a feather against his cheek, but the keen eyes of the youth at the stern seemed to see everything in advance, and, when necessary, he veered far enough outward to clear a larger branch that dipped lower or projected farther than usual over the placid water, turning inward again the moment it was safe to do so.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OTHER BOAT.

SUDDENLY the dugout glided beneath the huge, gnarled pine, which curved out from the shore and climbed high toward the moonlit sky. The youths looked at it with singular emotions, for it was from the base of the twisted trunk that the negro Steph fired the shot that came so near proving fatal to Dick Moreton.

Neither of the lads spoke, and the one who had had such a narrow escape continued plying his paddle with the noiseless smoothness of a veteran. Perhaps the remembrance of the incident caused him to give his strokes a little more vigour until the gruesome spot was left behind, but they were not a hundred yards distant when both were startled by the clear ring of a rifle-shot.

It was on the other side of the creek and so far off that they knew the weapon had not been fired at them, but it was the abrupt intrusion of the alarming sound into the brooding stillness, and the tense state of their nerves that imparted to the report more effect than otherwise would have been the case. Dick stopped paddling and listened.

"I would give a good deal to know what that meant," he said in a low voice.

"There 's no guessing," replied his companion; "it is not from the direction of your house, and it may have been fired by a Seminole or negro or white man."

Once more the paddle was dipped into the current and the dugout continued gliding onward with fair speed, though it hugged the shore so closely that the current could give little help. Jack was on the point of asking his friend to allow him to take his turn at the work, when he observed that he had again ceased using the implement and was holding it in suspense. When this had lasted for some moments, he asked:

"What 's the matter, Dick?"

"Sh! I heard something; did n't you?"

"No—yes,—there it goes!"

It was a plashing of the water, so gentle that neither could tell whether it came from a point above or below them. They did not speak, but gave their attention to listening, for the time and place imparted the gravest meaning to everything of that nature. Holding the paddle in one hand, Dick raised the other and caught hold of a small branch drooping over his head. The slight check was sufficient to hold the boat motionless.

The minutes passed without bringing anything in

the way of explanation, when it occurred to Dick to look toward the opposite shore, whence the report sounded, and as he did so he exclaimed:

“ Look there, Jack! ”

But his companion had observed the object at the same instant. Some kind of an animal had entered the creek from the farther bank and was swimming directly toward them. He was not a buck, for no antlers showed. His nose was visible, with the diverging ripples opening out like a fan behind him, and he might have been any one of the dozen species found in that part of the Territory. At rare intervals an alligator had been seen, but this was not a saurian.

Jack sat up in the craft with his gun ready for use.

“ Don’t fire,” whispered Dick.

“ I may have to do so; it looks as if he means to attack us.”

“ He won’t do that; he does n’t see us, and the sound of a gun may bring a score of Seminoles to the spot.”

“ All right; I won’t trouble him if he does n’t trouble us.”

“ It ’s a bear!” said Dick; “ he does n’t want to have anything to do with us.”

“ Well, he does n’t have to.”

It was remarkable that the animal was heading in almost a direct line for the dugout, which, it will

he remembered, had ceased to drift with the current. Dick was disposed to resume paddling, with a view of getting out of Bruin's path, but he was confident the brute would shy off the moment he descried them, which he must soon do. The youth therefore retained his grasp on the twig.

Jack could not have asked a better shot, for, as the animal drew nearer, he was in the full glow of the vivid moonlight, with the snout and upper part of his pig-like head offering the best kind of a target, but it would have been the height of imprudence to shoot when the actual necessity did not exist, so long as they were anxious to pass as far down the stream as they could before daylight.

Meanwhile, the bear came straight ahead, as if he meant to clamber into the boat or root it over. It was curious that he did not observe the obstruction, even when within a few strokes of it. The belief suddenly flashed upon Dick that he really meant to overturn the dugout, and, fearing that Jack might fire before he could prevent him, Dick let go of the limb, grasped his paddle with both hands, and circling it above his head, brought down the edge of the flat end with a resounding whack upon the nose of the brute, instantly repeating the blow, and throwing up both arms with a suppressed "*Shoo!*"

It is probable that this was the first knowledge the bear had that neighbours were so near. He was

aiming for shore, with no knowledge that he was crossing the path of anyone, when *bang! bang!* descended the implement upon his head. That he was astonished became clear when with a "Whoof!" he whirled around in the water and swam with all the vigour at his command for the shore he had left behind a few minutes before.

It may have been that through the brain of the naturally stupid animal there percolated a remembrance that he had just been fleeing from danger on that side of the creek, for before he had gone half way he once more changed his course, turned downstream, and when assured that he was fairly clear of the terrible creatures prowling amid the shadows along the western bank, he swam in among the same shadows lower down and was heard to clamber out, shake himself like a great shaggy dog, and lumber off.

The incident was an amusing one to the boys and suggested that the shot they had heard a brief while before was fired at the animal and possibly had wounded him. If such were the fact, and the Indian who had discharged his weapon had attempted pursuit, he, too, could not be far off. Dick released his hold of the swaying twigs and allowed the boat to drift with the current, refraining from using the paddle in order that he might the better listen and look.



But it was hardly probable that any Seminole or half-breed looked upon a bear as valuable enough to call for pursuit under the circumstances described, for nothing to suggest anything of the nature was seen or heard, and Dick finally added the propulsion of his paddle again to that of the current.

When the landmarks which they were able to recognize in the moonlight told them they had passed considerably more than a mile, they took heart, and, except for one or two well known facts, would have been much encouraged. All this time the moon was climbing toward the zenith, and the ribbon of shadow that had proven^d so welcome a screen steadily narrowed. Even though another was outlined on the farther shore, it was still narrower. The windings of the creek sometimes broadened this obscurity, but as often it was straightened, and the boys knew it was not far to a stretch of water where no wood or undergrowth appeared on either side. The forest and vegetation receded for a long way, so that it was as if the stream wound its way through a flat, barren country. This natural clearing was hardly a half-mile in extent, but because of the fact that the dugout must be in full view of anyone on either shore, the youths held it in special dread.

Just below this opening the creek emptied into the main stream, or St. John's River, along both

sides of which were abundant trees and exuberant undergrowth almost throughout its entire extent, with all the opportunity for concealment that could be desired. It will be seen how completely the two would have been at the mercy of the Seminoles, had the latter arranged an ambush anywhere along the dangerous stretch.

Filled with these forebodings, Dick Moreton declined the offer of Jack to take the paddle, and swayed the implement more deliberately, with all his senses on the alert. Jack Raymore was equally watchful, and when they were at some distance from the section in mind he emitted a sudden low, hissing sound which caused Dick to back water so abruptly that the boat instantly became motionless.

The lad in the front of the boat had discerned something that Dick could not see with sufficient clearness to identify. He again caught hold of one of the overhanging branches, and leaning forward asked in a cautious whisper,—

“What is it, Jack?”

“I believe there is a boat just ahead of us.”

This was important if true. Dick gently laid down his paddle, and, still holding the limb, leaned as far over as he could. He saw that an object was lying motionless, close to shore, and its dim outlines certainly suggested some sort of craft, though it was impossible to make it out clearly.

If a boat, the inevitable inference was that some one was in it, and the situation had suddenly become critical.

Jack being the nearer had the better opportunity to identify the craft. Bending over the prow he peered into the gloom for a moment, and then, half turning his head, whispered excitedly:

“ By gracious! it 's our own boat! ”

Dick was so astonished that he let go of the branch and shifted forward to gain a view of the amazing sight. Thus it came about that before he was aware, the dugout drifted across most of the intervening space, and, had he not abruptly checked its progress, he would have collided with the motionless craft. As it was, he was barely able to check himself in time.

But the mishap, if such it may be considered, had made evident another astonishing fact—the scow was without any occupant.

Convinced of this, Dick cautiously approached and laid the dugout aside of the smaller boat, which they perceived had caught by its mast and was held stationary among the overhanging branches.

“ I believe the owner of this dugout set our scow adrift out of meanness,” said Dick, “ and it has floated down here before catching fast.”

“ It has that look, but some of the Seminoles may be near.”

“ It is n’t likely; what would they want of such a boat? They never use any kind except a dug-out or canoe.”

“ Well, shall we make a trade?”

“ I don’t know whether that is worth while; I have become so accustomed to wielding this paddle that I can make better progress with the dugout. Besides, there is no wind to help us.”

The belief of the boys was reasonable. Had any Seminole attempted to use the flatboat—which was unlikely—he would not have acted as he must have done had he come thus far in it. The sail lay wrapped in the bottom, just as it had been placed there by the boys; the mast, of course, was still standing, and, above all, the boat had come to a pause several paces from land. Consequently, if the occupant had wished to leave it, he must have swum a short distance, for which there existed not the slightest necessity. Nothing appeared more certain than that Dick Moreton’s theory was correct, and that the craft had been shoved into the water and allowed to drift, the mischief-maker having done this in pure wantonness.

“ It looks, too,” added Jack, “ as if the dugout is the property of Steph, though you thought it belonged to a Seminole.”

“ I still think so, for it is the first time I ever looked upon it. If that fellow was the owner of a

dugout, I must have seen it many a time on the creek."

"But this is made to be used on the creek or river, and you never met it before as you say."

"Well, there's no use of talking about that; I see a way of making good use of our boat."

"How?"

"We are near that stretch of open country that we both dread, for we shall be in plain sight from one end to the other; let's set the scow adrift and allow it to float in front of us. We will keep a good distance to the rear, and if it goes through to the woods on the other side we can conclude that there's a fair chance for us. If it does n't, it won't do for us to try it."

"A good idea," replied the pleased Jack; "and now is the time to try it."

CHAPTER X.

ON DELICATE GROUND.

THE scheme was a shrewd one, but the boys understood the danger that accompanied it. Delicate work, keen eyesight, and prompt action were necessary.

Jack Raymore caught hold of the gunwale of the scow, and with a vigorous shove sent it so far out in the stream that it began floating with the current. Unless carried against the bank, it would drift into the main river and down that indefinitely. The bright moonlight kept it in sight for a long time, but gradually its outlines grew dim and indistinct, until only the most penetrating scrutiny was able to locate it. Then, when it was hovering on the line of invisibility, as may be said, Dick released his hold of the overhanging branch, sent the dugout to the same distance outward, and began the singular pursuit.

No use was made of the paddle except to retain the craft in its position, and since both boats were impelled by the same force, their speed was necessarily identical.

As before, the principal duty of maintaining a look-out devolved upon Jack at the front. He assumed a reclining posture, with his head resting on the prow, and gave his whole attention to the work, upon which it is not too much to say the fate of both depended.

It is a well-known peculiarity of vision that when one's eyes remain fixed upon a single object for any length of time, the object becomes blurred and indistinct. Thus, when we glance at the Pleiades, the seven stars are plainly perceived, but upon attempting to count and scrutinize them closely, one seems modestly to withdraw from our gaze, and only six can be identified. The youth's first look downstream revealed the flatboat so distinctly that he was on the point of asking Dick to back water, but a minute later he was in doubt whether the other craft was in sight at all.

"You had better drive ahead a little," he said in a low voice to his friend; "I can't see the scow."

"I can; it won't do to approach any closer; when your eyesight grows indistinct, glance at something else."

Jack tried the plan, and was surprised to observe how distinctly the other craft stood out in his field of vision. He continued to repeat the scheme and no longer doubted that they were following the craft as closely as was prudent.

By this time the two had left the protecting shadow of the forest on both sides of the stream and were drifting across the open stretch, where, if discovered by an enemy they would be in a most dangerous situation. Leaving to his comrade to keep track of the other boat, Dick scanned the bank on either hand, occasionally glancing behind him and listening with the closest attention possible.

He looked upon one fact as fortunate for them. While the width of the creek retained an almost uniform width of about a hundred feet, both banks were two or three feet in height, so that, when the lad stood upright at the bow, his eyes were just above the level of the land across which he looked toward the faint line of shadow which on the right and left marked the border of the wood that for some distance withdrew from the creek in the curious manner described.

Dick's intention was, in the event of detecting any of their enemies, to run close to the bank and hold the dugout stationary. There was no means of hiding themselves, and if any of the Seminoles approached the stream discovery was certain; but by lowering their heads they might escape detection by those who were a little way from the creek itself.

Perhaps half of the open stretch had been passed, when the boys were disturbed by two occurrences. Dick had been looking to his left, when he turned

his gaze toward the right shore. At the moment of doing so, something moved in his field of vision, but whatever it was it was so far off that he could not decide whether it was a man or animal. He peered intently and saw nothing. Then, recalling the advice given his companion, he turned his eyes downstream for a moment, when he again looked at the point where the strange object had attracted his attention.

He saw nothing. None the less he was sure he had not been mistaken at first, for the sight broke upon him without any expectation on his part. His conclusion, therefore, was that the man or animal, as it might be, was moving away instead of toward him and had passed the limit of his vision.

This, we say, was Dick Moreton's conclusion, but it did not fully satisfy him.

"It may have been an Indian, who saw my head and shoulders and has dropped to the ground where I cannot detect him."

This could be readily done, for the open space was covered with a stunted grass, that was luxuriant in many places, but which, sparse as it was in others, afforded all the concealment a stealthy red-skin could ask, because of the long interval between him and the dugout.

Suppose, having discovered the small boat with its occupants, the Seminole had started to creep

through the grass to the edge of the creek below. Since the boat was propelled wholly by the current, he could easily reach the stream in time to intercept it. But if there was but a single red man, what had the youths to fear? One had as much advantage as the other, and Dick and Jack could aim and fire as quickly as the best warrior of the Seminole tribe.

Dick was on the point of telling his companion his suspicions, when Jack turned his head and cautiously said:

“By gracious, Dick: The scow has stopped!”

Looking downstream, the young navigator perceived that the words were true. The flatboat could be seen so distinctly—and it was coming into better view all the time—that it was quite clear its progress, from some cause or other, had ceased. The fact, however, that the scow was close to the bank made it probable that it had run aground in the shallow water or had caught against some slight obstruction sufficient to hold it in check.

But behind this natural supposition remained the possibility that a much more serious cause might have to do with the stoppage. Dick by a slight swaying of the paddle held the dugout motionless.

“I wonder whether the Indians have had anything to do with that,” said Dick, speaking in a whisper, as did his friend.

“I don’t see how they can,” replied Jack, who

as yet knew nothing of what Dick had seen a brief while before.

“ These Seminoles do a good many things that we don't understand ; I saw something moving over yonder to the right a little while ago which may have been a warrior creeping through the grass toward the very spot where the scow has stopped.”

“ If he is up to anything of that kind, he will give some sign of it. 'Sh! Dick, let us listen.”

They did so for several minutes with such intense attention that each could hear the beating of his own heart. The stillness was profound, with that faint, almost inaudible murmur that has already been referred to as ever present in a great forest or solitude. Then suddenly from out this hollow silence sounded the sweet, low, musical notes of the whippoorwill. They issued from the depths of the woods on the right of the boys, and, heard at that hour and amid the solemn gloom and silence, they produced a weird effect upon them.

The exquisite trill sounded two or three times from the same throat, and then another responded from a point on the same side of the stream, but farther up and consequently much nearer the two.

“ By George!” said Jack, in the same guarded undertone; “ those two Seminoles understand their business.”

“ A real whippoorwill could n't beat them. I

believe, Jack, that those signals refer in some way to us!"

"I don't doubt it; but what shall we do—go ahead or turn back?"

"I see little choice; we are as close to the woods downstream as to those behind us, and by going ahead we shall be getting farther from the danger that started us on this business."

"And perhaps run right into the trap that is waiting, but it won't do to lead the way for the flatboat."

"We can set it free again and keep behind it."

"Wait a minute more."

While speaking they had been listening; but, save the calling of the whippoorwills—which they did not doubt were signals of the Seminoles—they were unable to hear the slightest sound that could help to explain what was passing around them.

Since both agreed that the stoppage of the scow was accidental, it seemed best for them to drift down to it and set it free again. Dick dipped his paddle into the water with the intention of hastening their progress, when both lads made the discovery at the same moment that the flatboat had resumed its own progress. In truth, it had floated so far already that it was barely discernible, and Dick continued using his paddle until the interval was decreased.

The occurrence made the youths more certain than before that the stoppage of the boat was an accident, as was its swinging loose again. Had the Seminoles been concerned in the business, there was no explanation of why they should have acted thus, since nothing could be gained by it. None the less, however, the vague, troublesome dread hung over the heads of the boys, who would have given anything in their possession to be safely across the open stretch and among the gloomy shadows of the woods beyond.

Several incidents, slight of themselves but possibly possessing significance, disturbed them. It was noticed that the flatboat, instead of drifting close to shore, where it had been resting, was working outward toward the middle of the stream. While this was possibly due to the winding course of the creek, it was probable it was not.

It was singular also that after hearing the signals of the whippoorwills given and answered, no repetition followed. This might have been due to the disquieting fact that the calls and replies were so well understood that there was no necessity of anything more of that nature.

Jack Raymore had resumed his reclining posture at the front of the dugout with his attention centred upon the faintly visible flatboat, when to his astonishment, his own craft suddenly made a

half-revolution, completely reversing the bow and stern.

"What are you doing, Dick?" he asked in amazement.

"Nothing; I am through," replied his companion with a smile. "You may take the paddle if you please and I will try my hand at watching."

There could be no objection to this and the change was effected. The implement was passed to Jack, who assumed the sitting posture, while Dick in his turn reclined with his gun in hand and his face close to the extreme limit of the prow. He had already cautioned the other to watch every point of the compass, for there was no telling whence the danger would come.

One fact that added to the probability that the scow was drifting aimlessly down-stream was, that it was floating sideways instead of in the position it would have maintained had any person to do with it. And yet, as Dick reflected, this aimless drifting might have a sinister significance and be only another form of the Seminole's cunning.

"There 's one comfort," reflected Dick; "this can't last much longer. We shall know the end within a half-hour or less—Ah——"

Something flashed at the side of the flatboat. It was as if a fish had come to the surface, flirted its tail in sport and dived downward again. And that

might have been the cause, but the alert Dick Moreton did not believe it. He pushed the barrel of his rifle farther along his side, with the muzzle extending out from the prow. No matter how sudden the emergency, he did not mean to be caught unprepared.

The next astonishing fact was that the flatboat was gradually righting itself,—that is, assuming a position parallel with the course of the creek. That Dick did not believe this was due to accident was proven by his remark to his companion:

“ Jack, as sure as you and I live, there is someone on that flatboat ! ”

CHAPTER XI.

A WAR-CHIEF.

THERE was no mistake about it. Dick Moreton did not speak until he was absolutely certain that the peculiar movements of the flatboat were due to a cause outside of itself, and that cause was one or more Seminole Indians.

Instinctively, Jack Raymore checked the progress of the dugout and the two whispered together.

"I am sure now it was a Seminole I caught sight of a while ago, and he crept through the grass to the point where the flatboat had stopped," said Dick.

"How could he know it had stopped there?"

"He did n't; it was one of those strange coincidences that happen oftener than people think."

"While the boat itself was hidden by the banks could he have noticed the mast as it drifted downstream?"

"No; an owl could not have seen that until he came nearer."

"Then he must have set the boat free and climbed over the side."

"It looks that way, but he ought to have known better than to betray himself as he has done."

"What shall we do?"

"I don't know; it's a queer state of affairs."

"Suppose I turn about and paddle up-stream as fast as I can to the shelter of the woods?"

"What shall we gain by that?"

"A good hiding-place."

"With little chance of ever being able to make our way out again."

It was at this juncture that the boys made a discovery that startled them more than anything that had taken place during the evening. The flatboat that had been the cause of so much perplexity was seen *ascending* the creek, and therefore approaching the spot where the dugout was motionless.

The cause of this strange occurrence was apparent. A Seminole was standing near the middle of the craft and plying the pole with a skill and vigour that neither of the boys could have surpassed, though they were more accustomed to that manner of progress than he.

This proceeding it may be said "forced the hand" of the youths. They decided to stay where they were and await the coming of the warrior and the scow.

"I'll keep him covered with my gun," whispered Dick, "while you hold the boat motionless."

"There may be others who are out of sight."

“ You must be ready for that, but I think there is only one.”

The programme was carried out. Lying on his face in the dugout with the muzzle of his weapon projecting over the prow, Dick kept it pointed toward the dusky foe who was in plain sight and could have been picked off at any moment. All the time the youths were looking for that which they dreaded to see,—the crowns of several Seminoles crouching in the bottom of the scow and peeping over the plank sides, on the watch for a shot at the lads who were calmly awaiting their approach. Nothing, however, of that nature caught their eye, though the fear was not wholly removed that they might be there all the same.

It was certainly remarkable the way the single warrior exposed himself. He stood bolt upright, except when pressing the long pole against the bottom of the stream. Being thus occupied, he must have laid his rifle at his feet, where he could not stoop and catch it up without being anticipated by the watchful Dick.

The intervening distance was steadily lessened until but a few paces separated the craft. Seeing the flatboat possessed sufficient momentum to carry it across the remaining interval, the Seminole abruptly paused, straightened up, and faced the astonished boys. As he did so, the strong moonlight

revealed his face as clearly as if the sun were shining.

The next instant Jack came to a sitting position like a flash and exclaimed :

“ My gracious ! it ’s Osceola ! ”

Upon hearing his name pronounced, the famous war-chief grinned and in a voice that was musical and pleasing said :

“ How do you do, brothers ? ”

“ Why, you are the last one we expected to see, Osceola,” continued the pleased Dick. “ Have you any one with you ? ”

This notable man spoke English with as much fluency as Seminole, which displays a good deal of the smooth liquidity of the Spanish.

“ I am alone,” he answered.

The boats had come so close that he stooped over, and grasping the side of the dugout brought the two together, holding them thus, while he sat down on the gunwale of the scow, within arm’s length of the boys.

They were unfeignedly glad of the meeting. They had done Osceola a great favour the preceding day, and he was not the one to forget it. Though he was not of pure blood, the great war-chief was a thorough Indian in his emotions, beliefs, and in his likes and dislikes. There had been a peculiar friendship for years between him and the son of Captain

Moreton. He had eaten at the table of the settler, and it was not once but many times that Dick and Osceola had gone on long hunting excursions together.

It was not to be expected that any feeling of that nature should exist between the chief and Jack Raymore, who never saw the Seminole until the preceding afternoon; but the fact that the white youth was a friend of Osceola's friend was a pretty good passport for Jack.

Few understood the Seminole better than Dick. No matter how bitter the warfare between the whites and red men, the youth was sure the hand of their greatest leader would never be raised against him, except possibly in two contingencies.

The first was the taking up of arms against the Seminoles by Dick. Since the outbreak of hostilities, and especially since Dick's father had gone to the front, the sturdy youths had been thinking of doing the same, for they feared the time was near when they and all other young men would be needed to defend their homes; but that day had not yet arrived and therefore need not be considered.

The second contingency was the taking up of arms by the parent of Dick. He had already done so, and the fact was known to the African Steph, but surely he could have had no opportunity as yet to acquaint Osceola with the fact, so, for the time being, no thought need be given to that. Even

should it become known to the chief, it was by no means established that he would direct his enmity against the son, though the chasm must yawn between him and the parent.

There was nothing in the manner of Osceola to cause distrust on the part of the youths. All three assumed easy positions in their respective boats, which were allowed to drift down-stream with the current. They were quite near the St. John's, and, if their progress were unchecked, would soon debouch into the larger stream.

"Where are you going?" asked the chief.

"My cousin and I have started for his home, which you know is a good way down the river," replied Dick, who did the talking for the two.

"Why did you start at night?"

"The moon shines so bright that it is as pleasant as by day."

"Why did you not use your own boat?" continued Osceola, who certainly displayed a large degree of curiosity.

"We intended to do so, but when we came down to the side of the creek, it was gone; somebody had set it adrift."

"Where did you get the dugout?"

"It lay against the bank, near where we had left our own boat, and it was all that we could find, so we borrowed it," replied Dick with a smile.

Osceola turned his head and carefully scrutinized the boat. It was so evident that he was trying to identify it that the lad asked :

“ Do you know whom it belongs to ? ”

Before answering, he took the paddle from the hand of Jack and turned it over and over. Then he passed it back with a smile that displayed his handsome teeth.

“ It belongs to Osceola, the war-chief of the Seminoles.”

“ To you ! ” exclaimed the astonished Dick ; “ why, I never dreamed of that ; then you were near our house to-night ? ”

“ No, I was not.”

“ How, then, came it to be there ? ”

“ Somebody stole it ; I think it was the black man Steph.”

“ There is no doubt of it, for we overheard him talking with our servant Cato ; he must have gone to our house in your boat and expected to use it to come away.”

“ Steph is a bad man,” said the chief sternly, but immediately spoiled the declaration by adding : “ Steph is a good man because he hates the white people ; he will help us to kill all of them in Florida.”

“ I have no doubt he would be glad to help kill my father and me and my cousin.”

Osceola turned his face with the moonlight shin-

ing fair upon it, and looked into the countenance of the youth for a moment with a curious expression. He was grave, but his black eyes seemed to scintillate with a light of their own.

“ Yes; Steph would be glad to do that; I have heard him say so many times.”

Jack thought it singular that his companion did not relate the incident of the previous afternoon when the African made the attempt to shoot his cousin, but since he refrained, Jack held his peace.

“ We believed the same, and so we made up our minds that we could not get out of the country too soon. That is why we did not wait till morning.”

“ You heard Steph and Cato talking together and you slipped away without their seeing you ? ” was the inquiring remark of Osceola.

“ That is what took place.”

“ You and your people will go out of Florida ? ”

“ We had not thought of *that*,” was the reply of Dick; “ but we expected to go to the home of my cousin, which you know is quite a town and is close to the coast.”

Again the eyes of the war-chief seemed to take on a burning intensity which no one needed to see more than once to remember all his life.

“ That will not be enough,” he said in a low but impressive voice; “ for all the whites in Florida who do not flee into the States or take ship and go out

on the ocean will be killed. We shall spare none. Even if you and your friends are found here, I shall not be able to save you."

"It is the old dream, Osceola, that King Philip, Pontiac, Tecumseh, and others dreamed before you were born; but it proved only a dream with them, as it will prove with you. Every one was killed in battle, for the white men are like the leaves on the trees or the sand on the seashore; if you should kill all in Florida, others will come until the Seminoles are trampled under foot and crushed."

These were brave words for a youth to say to the leader of the hostile Seminoles, but Dick Moreton felt a liking and respect for Osceola and thought it his duty to tell him the truth.

"There are not enough white people," said the chieftain passionately, "to crush the Seminoles. We have hidden our women and children where even the bloodhounds of your people cannot trace them; we can shoot and strike, and if it be needful for a time we can run into the swamps and hide. What white man dare follow us into the Everglades?"

"I don't think there would be much fun in it, but you cannot live there forever; you cannot save your crops, and there is not enough game to support you; after a time, too, the white men will hunt you out. Osceola," said Dick solemnly, "you have my sympathy; you and your people have been

treated wrongly by the white settlers; the treaty of Payne's Landing was unjust to you, but I see no choice left for the Seminoles."

"What does my friend and young brother think Osceola and his people ought to do?" asked the chief, bending over until his face was but a few inches from that of Dick Moreton, who looked calmly into the flashing eyes as he answered:

"I think you will be wise if you bring your women and children out of the swamps and go westward with them into the Indian Territory beyond the Mississippi. You do not like the Creeks whom you will have for your neighbours; but the Seminoles are brave and can take care of themselves. The white men, too, will help to keep the Creeks on their own grounds. By and by, you will grow to like your new homes, though I believe with you that you have the right to stay in Florida as long as you choose."

"And we **WILL** stay here!" fairly thundered Osceola. "We will die among the swamps and creeks of the Everglades,—every man, woman, and child of us,—before we will be driven from our homes! A Seminole knows how to fight, and he knows how to die!"

Dick shrank from arousing the chief to a dangerous degree, for he had touched upon the subject that lay nearest to his heart.

“ Seminole, you are older than I, and it is not becoming in me to offer you words of counsel; forget what I have said.”

The apology seemed to touch the chieftain, but he could not wholly throw off the spell that was on him.

“ The Great Father at Washington sent seven of our chiefs to the Indian Territory to look at the land. They looked at it and did not like it; they said so and started home to tell our people the same. But the men that the Great Father sent with them gave the chiefs fire-water that stole away their wits; they made them presents of blankets, rifles, ammunition, beads, and wampum; then they gave them more fire-water and, lo! the chiefs cried out in loud voices that the land was fair and pleasing, and that all of our people should make haste to go thither.”

We grieve to say that a careful delving into history gives the best of reasons for believing that the shameful charges made by Osceola against the agents of the United States Government and against the deputy chiefs of his own people were substantially true, as were the assertions with which he followed the charges.

“ It was agreed that we should remove if we were satisfied; but no, the Great Father at Washington said the agreement was that if the seven chiefs who went to the Indian Territory were satisfied; and the fire-water of the white men and their presents made

them see no evil. They were traitors!" added Osceola, with startling fierceness; "and we slew two of them; one I killed—Ma-on-o-paw—with my own hand, and I shall kill the others if they do not run too fast and hide in the woods where I cannot find them."

Dick dreaded lest the chief should advert to General Wiley Thompson, the Indian agent in Florida, and the one man toward whom he felt the most rancorous hatred. Sure enough, before the youth could interpose to divert Osceola's thoughts, he said with a fierceness which it is impossible to describe:

"I told General Thompson the truth; he knew it was the truth; I drove my hunting-knife through the treaty and told him he had misled us all, and he put irons on my wrists and ankles and shut me up in prison."

It would have been the truth had Dick Moreton reminded Osceola at this point that, as we have stated, he signed the same treaty and promised to persuade others to do so. It would have been true, we repeat, had the youth said this, but it would not have been a politic proceeding, and he held his peace. However, Osceola was not ashamed of the duplicity by which he secured his freedom and he boasted of it, but while the words were in his mouth, he turned abruptly upon Dick with the demand,—

"Where is your father?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEMINOLE CAMP.

IT was a startling question, but the youth was not unprepared.

“ He went to my uncle’s house and was there when I left.”

This was explicit and to the point. Osceola could not gainsay it, nor take the son to task, but the query had very much the appearance of being based on a suspicion of the truth. No one could say how the Seminole chieftain would act toward the son of a soldier who was fighting against his tribe, but Dick was quite certain he would offer him no violence. He feared the result, however, to Jack Raymore, who was a blood relative of the soldier.

While this singular conversation was under way, it will be remembered that both boats were drifting down-stream. No one of the three seemed aware of the fact until the bright moonlight was suddenly obscured by the dense shadow that covered almost every part of the stream, since the moon was declining in the heavens and most of the long autumn night had already passed.

Dick had managed to calm the ruffled feelings of the war-chief by turning the talk upon other matters, skilfully mixing some judicious flattery with his words, when Osceola abruptly paused and looked around as the darkness enveloped them. Jack was eager to hear his cousin ask Osceola to explain how he managed to reach the shore of the creek in time to go aboard of the flatboat, and why he acted in the peculiar manner he did; but evidently Dick thought it better not to question the dusky fellow too closely concerning his own doings.

"We are glad to have your company, Osceola," he said, observing his action as they plunged into the gloom; "we are near the river; will you not go with us a good part of the way?"

"No; I must meet my warriors. I shall soon see General Thompson; there will be more white soldiers in Florida, and I must lead my warriors against them."

"Is your camp near?"

"Are you blind that you do not see it?" he asked sharply.

As if the question was an "Open sesame," the boys at the same moment saw the reflection of fire-light on the stream in front. Starting on the right shore its rays were thrown against the undergrowth and trees on the opposite side, showing that a large fire was burning near the water.

"It 's lucky we have you with us," said Dick, "for we should have made bad work in trying to get past that without your help."

The chieftain made no reply; he had loosened his hold upon the dugout and the two craft were floating side by side. His head was turned as if he were looking downstream for the appearance of some one or the occurrence of an expected event.

The distance was too great for those in the boats to see any of the Indians gathered about the camp-fire, when Osceola stood up in the scow and emitted three tremulous whoops which were instantly responded to by some one in camp. The signals sounded hollow and uncanny among the trees in the weird silence of the night. Evidently the chief was recognized by his warriors who were looking for his coming.

The question with the boys was as to what their course should be. It would not do for them to undertake to pass a war party like that, unprotected by the chieftain who doubtless expected to halt. Had the youths come in sight of the light while descending the stream when alone, they would have been compelled to leave their craft and flank the danger-point by walking around it, for it would have been impossible to carry either boat through the wood and launch it again below.

Slowly the intervening space was passed, and the

yellow illumination on the dark water grew clearer. It would not do to wait longer, and Dick looked up to his friend:

“What are we to do, Osceola?”

“Come with me; I will protect you.”

Strange how at the most critical times we notice trifles that escape us under other circumstances. Dick Moreton noticed nothing peculiar in the reply of the chief, but Jack Raymore, who, it will be remembered, had played the part of listener, always insisted that Osceola gave a slight but curious intonation to the last word of his answer. It must have been slight to escape his cousin, but so it was, while to Jack it resembled an odd circumflex, which destroyed the sincerity of the words themselves.

“He means that he will protect Dick, but I must look out for myself,” was the mental conclusion of Jack; “well, I shall try to do so, but it does n’t seem as if I had much of a show. I am glad, however, that he ’s provided for,” was the unselfish thought of the youth.

Meanwhile, both boats had been turned to shore, and their prows stuck fast in the earth which was spongy and sticky at that point. Moving up the gentle slope, each with rifle in hand and Osceola leading, the youths came upon a scene the like of which they had never before looked upon.

There was a natural opening, fully a half acre in

extent in the wood, and in the very middle of this was heaped a mass of wood, branches, limbs, and bark, which was burning so vigorously that the whole expanse was illuminated. The moonlight would have served for a portion, but where its rays fell they were overcome by the yellow glow from the flames.

Around the huge fire were gathered fully two hundred men, every one of whom had a gun, powder-horn, and bullet-pouch, while a large majority carried huge knives thrust in their girdles or displayed somewhere about their persons. They were attired in a dozen different varieties of costume, including the leggings, hunting-shirt, and head-dress of the Indian, the dilapidated garments of the regular vagrant or tramp, and the attire of the white man. Some wore high-topped boots, some one boot and shoe apiece, some shoes, while fully a score were barefooted. Among them all it may be doubted whether six had stockings. There were straw hats without crowns, others with crowns and no rims, and three that showed no signs of wear. One might have been tempted to smile at a number of women's bonnets which appeared here and there but for the inevitable thought of the dreadful means by which they had been secured, other articles of women's finery giving emphasis to the sad question.

But variegated and motley as was the array of

clothing, amid which were men without coat or vest, and some with only one of those garments, and mostly with shabby trousers, the interest lay in the faces, which would have attracted attention anywhere.

Somewhat more than one half of the mob were pure Seminoles in young and middle life, while the rest included mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, and full-blooded negroes, with a mixture of blood which the owner himself could not have identified had he striven to do so. A few looked as if they were wholly Circassian, but it is almost certain that there was a strain of negro or Indian blood or of both in their veins. The Florida Seminoles were a mongrel people, the like of which was never seen anywhere on this continent, but, as has been remarked, it was the Indian taint that dominated all others, and like the bit of leaven, leavened the whole lump.

It may be said that every one of the group was a desperate man. The mixture of blood generally vitiates human nature, and it cannot be doubted that among this group were many who would hesitate to commit no evil, no matter how atrocious—their faces showed it. The fragments of plunder, and, saddest of all, the sight of more than one human scalp left no question that a number of the party had borne a hand in the taking of innocent lives.

Most of the men were stretched on the ground asleep, for it will be remembered that the hour was late, and the previous day had not been an idle one with them. Although the country was sparsely settled at the time, there were dwellings here and there scattered over that part of Florida, which offered strong temptations to the lawless set that were fairly let loose, and who gave full play to their evil passions.

It may be doubted whether there were a dozen blankets in the group, and it was rare in looking around to see a person who was not lying upon the hard, dry earth, some flat on their backs, with limbs outstretched, some on their sides, with a part of a hat covering their countenances, and others doubled and twisted into the most fantastic of postures.

Of these men more than a score were astir. They had been lolling on the ground, smoking their clay pipes and discussing the raids in which they had taken part, and the many more in which they expected to help. Upon hearing the signal of Osceola, those who were awake rose to their feet, and their leader made the response as already stated. Altogether, they formed a fair type of the hordes that during the first half of the century were known as Seminoles, and who, with the almost impenetrable background of morass, forest, and swamp, were able for season after season, and year after year,

to defy all the efforts of the United States forces to drive them out and compel them to join the tribes that had already crossed the Mississippi and taken up their homes in the distant Indian Territory.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

SUCH was the striking and picturesque group upon which Dick Moreton and Jack Raymore looked as they walked forward from the bank of the creek to the Seminole camp-fire.

It was apparent from the manner of the mongrels and Indians who were awake that they were astonished by what they saw. Osceola, proud, erect, and with a kingly mien, as was befitting the foremost chieftain and leader of the warlike group, strode forward with Dick on his right and his cousin on the left, and all side by side, none pausing until they had approached so close to the roaring fire that the warmth was plainly felt.

It cannot be said that the boys felt comfortable. It seemed to Dick that the friendship of the war-chief, upon which he wholly relied, ought to have induced Osceola to act differently. He should have told them to go forward in the dugout and use the precious hours in getting as far as they could from the dangerous section. His power over his followers would have enabled the Seminole to do this,

while now the impending situation presaged grave complications.

But there was no choice for the youths, and they bravely faced the inevitable. Several of the group surveyed them curiously, then made a sort of military salute to Osceola, who paid no attention, and straightway an animated conversation began in the language of the red men, no word of which was intelligible to the boys, who calmly looked on and listened.

They supposed that two of the group who did nearly all the talking for the warriors were making some kind of a report to their chief, who for a time said little, and, judging by the intonation of his voice, was asking questions. He did not appear wholly satisfied with the answers, but at the end of ten or fifteen minutes turned to the cousins and said :

“ You will lie down and sleep till morning.”

“ Where ? ” asked the disappointed Dick, looking around.

“ Anywhere,” was the reply ; “ the earth is our bed and the sky our blanket.”

“ We must make the best of it,” said Dick, with a smile at Jack ; “ for there is n’t much of a choice. Good-night, Osceola.”

The chief nodded his head but did not speak, and the youths began picking their way through the group, stretched in all possible attitudes, taking

care not to disturb any of the sleepers, too many of whose companions were already awake.

"Can't we make a break?" asked Jack in an undertone, when they were near the margin of the clearing.

"I was thinking of that," replied Dick, in the same careful voice; "I don't understand Osceola's course toward us. I am afraid of offending him, for our lives are now in his hands. He told us to lie down and sleep, and it would anger him if we disobeyed; he has a fearful temper."

"But we could get a good start and be well on our way by morning."

They continued moving slowly, their hearts beating fast with the project that had taken shape so suddenly in their minds. They could go but a few steps farther without entering the dense shadow of the wood.

"Wait a minute," whispered Dick.

They halted and began looking about them, as if searching for a favourable spot to sleep. While doing so, Dick in the most natural manner turned part way around and glanced in the direction of the camp-fire. He saw Osceola and several of his companions evidently watching their actions.

"It won't do," added Dick; "if we go a half-dozen steps farther they will fire or dash forward and bring us back."

“ One place is as good as another ; let ’s try this.”

They had passed beyond the farthest line of sleepers, most of whom desired a portion, even though very slight, of the warmth of the fire while they slumbered. The ground was sandy, with a sparse growth of stunted grass, and when the youths lay down, they noticed that it still retained a perceptible degree of the heat received during the day from the sun.

It must have impressed the Seminoles strangely when they saw both youths quietly kneel on the bare ground and spend several minutes in prayer before giving themselves up to sleep. Probably all had heard of the white man’s Great Spirit, but few or none believed in him.

As the boys lay down on the earth, instead of placing themselves back to back they faced each other, so as to exchange a few words without being overheard, though, as has been said, no one was very near.

“ Dick,” said Jack, “ if we don’t get out of this place to-night we never shall.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Osceola’s friendship for you has been stretched to the breaking-point, while he has n’t any at all for me.”

“ You helped to protect him yesterday from that hunter who was pursuing him.”

"And he thinks he has paid the debt by bringing us down the river."

"I will own, Jack, that I feel uneasy, but it is on account of a different matter than what puzzles you."

"What is it?"

"You heard him ask me to-night where my father was; that question showed he suspects he has enlisted. He knows he was a soldier in the war of 1812."

"You made a clever answer, which appeared to satisfy him."

"You forget an important fact. That scamp Steph that we left at home with Cato must have soon found out what we did. When he came down to the creek and saw that his dugout was gone, he suspected the truth, which he could easily learn by going back to the house. Even if he had no boat with which to follow us, he has done so on foot; he knows about this camp and will be here by morning."

"And what then?"

"He will tell Osceola and the others what he learned about father from Cato, and the jig will be up."

"You think he will be so angered that he will turn against you?"

"I don't doubt it."

"Including me in the programme?"

“ It will be like him, though he has no special cause for enmity against you.”

“ He has the greatest of all possible causes.”

“ What is that ? ”

“ I belong to the same race with General Wiley Thompson; it has been his friendship for you that has protected me thus far. All this, Dick, assures me that we must make a break to-night, for it is our only chance.”

“ I think the same; it can't be long till daylight and the hours are mighty precious, but they will soon be asleep.”

“ The trouble is they will place sentinels and we shall be watched, though I think that if we pretend slumber, they may be misled.”

Now came about a situation which may be mildly characterized as peculiar. It will be recalled that when the boys were stretched on their comfortable bed in the home of Dick Moreton, they found it impossible to woo slumber. In sheer desperation, they left their couch and made the night journey down-stream. They had passed through more than one peril, and were now in greater danger, as they believed, than ever before, but despite the changed environments, both became drowsy. Their eyelids were heavy and “ sandy,” even after their vigorous rubbing and the repeated resolves to keep their wits about them.

" I tell you, Dick, it won't do for us to go to sleep," said Jack with determination; " we 'll keep watch of Osceola and the fellows by the camp-fire, and when they lie down we 'll make a ' do or die ' of it."

" Suppose they don't lie down ? "

" We 'll try it anyway; some of them must give up, for they need sleep as much as white folks, and there can't be any fun in talking forever."

Dick raised his head a few inches, partly turning on his side, and looked toward the fire. The illumination was so vivid that he easily identified Osceola, who stood in the full glare, gesticulating vigorously and addressing angry words to two Seminoles who seemed to be arguing some question with him. They were the only three who stood up, the rest of the group sitting or half reclining, and all smoking. They were wide awake, but had turned over the discussion to the trio named.

Osceola's position was such that his face was turned toward the recumbent youths, who could not have risen to their feet without being observed, for several of the silent warriors kept the fire burning so brightly that its rays reached every side of the natural clearing and were reflected from the bodies of the couple who were eager to carry out their plan for leaving the spot before daylight.

When Dick reported to his companion what he saw, he added :

“ It won’t do to rise and dash off, or even to stoop and try the sneak act. Osceola keeps looking this way, as if he suspects something of the kind.”

“ Why did n’t he make us lie down nearer the camp or send some of them to watch us ? ”

“ He must believe there is no need of it.”

“ I don’t believe he will stop talking or looking this way till daylight,” was the disgusted remark of Jack a few minutes later, after he had taken a peep over his chum’s shoulder and found the situation unchanged; “ why not creep to the wood ? ”

“ He will be quite sure to detect us, but I believe it is the only thing to do; I ’m willing to try it.”

“ And if he sees us, and orders us to stop, we ’ll run ? ”

“ That ’s it. You are closer to the wood; suppose you make a start ? ”

To their intense annoyance, one of the nearest forms, which was not more than a dozen feet distant and stretched between them and the fire, was heard to be moving. The youths ceased whispering and watched. A man flung an old straw hat from his face, lifted his head, and he too looked in the direction of the blaze, as if the conversation disturbed his slumber. If he intended to order the noise to cease, he changed his mind when he saw who the principal offender was and lay down again.

While this slight occurrence was disturbing, it had

one peculiarity which robbed it of all sinister significance. The Indian, or half-breed, as he may have been, never looked behind him in the direction of the boys. He was lying on his side, facing the fire, and he did not shift his position in the slightest. No stronger proof could be required that he was unaware of the presence of the youths in camp.

"We need n't be afraid of *him*," whispered Jack; "he does n't know anything about us; it 's Osceola that 's our stumbling-block."

"But it is best to wait a few minutes."

They waited, with the result that it proved fatal to the whole plot. While talking, they managed to fight off their growing drowsiness, but now when they lay motionless and silent, the insidious enemy that no man can defeat quickly overcame them. Within the following five minutes the senses of the two drifted off and they sank into a dreamless slumber that was not broken until the sun was shining in the heavens.

Dick Moreton was the first to awake, and when he realized his situation his chagrin almost overwhelmed him.

"Jack," he called, giving his companion an impatient kick, "have n't you had enough sleep?"

His cousin mumbled, rubbed his eyes, looked about him, after rising to a sitting position, and then asked:

“ Well, Dick, does n’t it beat all ? What chumps we are ! We threw away the only chance we had by going to sleep.”

“ It may be so,” replied Dick, but, regaining hope with the natural buoyancy of youth, asked, “ who can say, after all, that it was n’t the best thing for us ? ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Very likely we should have failed.”

“ And what better can we do now ? ”

“ That will soon be seen ; remember, Jack, what your father has often said,—‘ while there ’s life there ’s hope.’ ”

CHAPTER XIV.

SEVERAL SURPRISES.

THERE is nothing like accepting the ills of life with Christian philosophy. If a misfortune is irremediable, we can but make it worse by fret and worry. Let us try, therefore, to meet all calamities with fortitude and resignation, and emulate the good example of that honest sailor, who, when he fell from the masthead and broke his leg, straightway thanked God because it was not his neck.

The scene upon which the eyes of the boys opened was more fanciful and grotesque, if possible, in the light of the morning than on the night before. Every man of the two hundred was astir, and their rags, variety of costume, complexion, outfit, and appearance could not have been more strongly marked. Some of them were strolling through the wood, a large number were gathered about the three fires, two additional ones having been kindled, and at each several were preparing meat in the aboriginal fashion, which consisted of holding large chunks skewered on sticks over the blaze, and turning them round and over, until, when the food was little more

than scorched it was deemed fit for eating. Others were gathered in groups talking with one another, and still others were seated or lolling on the earth.

The boys first looked around for Osceola, for it was natural that they should cling to him as a protector among so large a group, where every one else was viewed as a bitter enemy, but nothing was seen of him. The cousins felt their situation to be critical, but decided it best to put a bold face on the matter.

Being civilized boys the first want they felt on waking from sleep was water for the purpose of ablution.

“ Let ’s go to the creek and wash our faces and hands,” said Dick, rising to his feet; “ I suppose we shall get something to eat, for it ’s a fact, Jack, that I never felt hungrier in my life.”

“ And I feel the same way, but there won’t be much show without Osceola, and I don’t see anything of him.”

“ He can’t be far off; come on.”

It was inevitable that the boys should draw attention to themselves when they started across the clearing for the stream, a hundred yards distant. The majority of the party learned for the first time of their presence in camp, and, stopping abruptly in the walking back and forth or conversation, they stared in undisguised astonishment at the two as

they began moving, rifles in hand, at a moderate pace toward the water, but no attempt was made to stop them until half the distance was passed.

A burly, full-blooded negro, with a straw hat without any crown, a ragged waistcoat, a pair of trousers one of whose legs was frayed to the knee, the foot of which was bare, while the other displayed a dilapidated shoe without strings, suddenly obtruded himself across their path. He had a long-barrelled musket in one hand, and in the waist of his trousers, which were suspended by a single cord, was thrust a formidable knife, half of whose blade was revealed.

No face could have been more repellent, and when he stepped in front of the boys and impudently surveyed them from head to foot, the two instinctively saw that trouble was coming.

"We must keep our temper," said Jack warningly, "for he means to stop us."

And having uttered this good counsel, Jack was the first to disregard it. He was slightly in advance of his companion, because of which fact the negro addressed his words to him.

"Say, who be you folks?"

It was not the question itself so much as the insolent manner in which it was expressed that roused the anger of both boys. It will be remembered that they were Southerners by birth, and unaccus-

tomed to being addressed in this style by inferiors. The insult, therefore, cut deeper than otherwise.

Jack stopped short and looking straight into the dusky countenance replied :

“ None of your business ! ”

Just then it would have been in order for Dick to volunteer some good advice, but it has to be admitted that his resentment was as deep as his cousin's, and he would have made precisely the same reply had he not been anticipated.

The African grinned, but it was a grin of anger and not of mirth. His question was somewhat illogical :

“ Wharfur it aint none ob my bus'ness, eh ? ”

“ I have answered you,” said Jack ; “ step out of my way.”

“ I reckon I don' hab to do dat ; white folks aint no better dan brack ones ; in dis camp dey aint half so good, and I 'll teach you dat.”

Each youth grasped his rifle firmly with both hands. Jack was resolved that on the first demonstration of the African he would shoot him down, while Dick was determined that his cousin would have to be very quick in his action to prevent being forestalled.

Hardly had the flurry opened when it attracted the attention of others in the vicinity, who hurriedly closed around, pleased at the prospect of an angry

collision. The faces of the Indians, negroes, and half-breeds revealed their delight over the expected entertainment.

The situation was "acute" as may be said, for while the lads might have found no trouble in disposing of a single negro, they must of necessity have been helpless in the presence of the scores who were fully armed and on every hand.

Where, all this time, was Osceola? Dick and Jack did not know or care. They had ceased to look for him, and for the present he did not enter into their calculations.

It must have been that the African's courage was kept keyed to the proper pitch by the presence of his companions. It would have required more courage to back down before them than to bluff it out.

While the indignation of Jack Raymore was as fierce as ever, he was discreet enough to give his enemy a chance to "modify his demands." Instead, therefore, of advancing directly upon him, the boy turned to one side, as if with the intention of flanking his position, but the negro was on the alert, and with a single side step placed himself again across the path of the lad. Not only that, but he suddenly drew his terrible knife, and with an expression of ferocity said:

"White folks, look out! Pete Guinness is gwine to kill yo'!"



With the weapon firmly held, he bent into a crouching posture, thrust his head and shoulders forward, and took a single step. It was brief and made with the silent slowness of a cat or tiger about to leap upon its prey.

Neither of the boys recoiled an inch. It was not necessary for Jack Raymore to aim his weapon, with so brief an interval between them. It was held at his side, the right hand on the lock and the left farther up the barrel which pointed straight at the evil form in front. The lad drew back the clumsy hammer with its cumbrous flint-lock, the dull click being plainly heard in the deep hush that reigned, except when broken by the voices of the combatants who thus faced one another.

All that was necessary was for Jack to exert a little more pressure on the trigger, and that he was fully determined to do upon the second step of the negro. What would then follow could not be doubted.

But the second step was never taken. The crouching negro suddenly went over backward with such violence that, as his feet flew upward, the single shoe was flung several yards over his head, and the knife spun still farther in a side direction, the force of the African's impact with the ground driving a heavy grunt from him.

"Blas'nation! who doned dat?" he demanded, scrambling to his feet and glaring around him.

Over he went again, turning a complete back somersault. A thunderbolt could not have smitten him more resistlessly, for it was the fist of Osceola, impelled with the same tremendous impulse that drove his hunting-knife through the Payne treaty and the top of the table on which it lay. Had the skull belonged to anyone except an African, assuredly it would have been shattered like an egg-shell. As it was, Pete Guinness lay still, with no further interest for the time in the "subsequent proceedings."

The face of the chief was like that of the great Shawnee Tecumseh when he turned upon British General Proctor and demanded why he stood by and permitted the torture of the American prisoners.

Osceola, however, did not speak. It may be said there was no need of words, for his action was more forcible than any utterance could have been. He, too, held a rifle in his left hand, but the other, which had done all this execution, now snatched the knife from his girdle, as he took position, with one foot slightly advanced, and waited for the victim of his fury to rise. Had he done so, there can be no doubt that the chief would have finished him with a single terrific sweep of the weapon, so it may be believed that the stroke which stretched the African senseless on his back was a merciful one.

Not the least impressive accompaniment of the

incident was the silence which marked every step. While the brief exchange of words was going on between Jack Raymore and the negro, no one else spoke, not even Dick Moreton. The spectators contented themselves with looking on and grinning with anticipation. At the critical moment, Osceola, who from some distance read the meaning of the scene, dashed to the spot like a cyclone, and, without uttering a word, made what it will be admitted was an effective disposition of the cause of the strained situation.

But when standing over the prostrate body, his face aflame with fury, he was silent. Waiting a few seconds, and seeing no signs of motion in the victim, he turned to the motionless boys and without any apparent excitement in his tones, said:

“ Now go, but come back again! ”

“ We thank you, Osceola,” replied Dick Moreton, who led the way to the creek with his cousin at his side. The mongrels fell back and gave them room. The boys longed to look around, but refrained lest it might displease the chief whose passion had been so roused, and they did not speak until at the water’s edge they had laid down their rifles, knelt, and quaffed from the clear water. Then they bathed their faces and hands, using their handkerchiefs for towels.

“ I guess it was a good thing, Dick, that

Osceola arrived just when he did," said Jack with a chuckle.

"It was a good thing all round; the next second you would have shot Peter, and then I suppose the crowd would have jumped on us, and, Jack, I have a suspicion that we should have found them too many."

"Quite likely; it looks, too, as if we are solid for the present with Osceola, but there's no saying how long it will last. He must see that it would have been better for all if he had let us go on our way last night."

"I would give a good deal to know his intentions; he has so many men here, and every one armed, that I believe he intends to lead them on some expedition against the whites."

"There is no fort near us."

"But plenty of settlers between here and St. Augustine; I think there is a post some miles to the left, lately established, and there may be bodies of soldiers marching toward it; no doubt his long talk with the leaders last night had much to do with the campaign he has under way."

"Which makes it all the more unaccountable to me why he keeps us in camp, unless," added Jack, lowering his voice, "he means to hold us as hostages for some of his warriors who have been captured by our soldiers."

"That may be the fact, but what's the use of

speculating ? He has told us to come back, and we must n't rouse his ill-will by staying away too long."

The boys walked up the gentle slope and started across the open space toward the nearest fire, where the cooking had been going on long enough for the bystanders to be furnished with good-sized pieces of partly cooked meat in the form of veal and pork that had been undoubtedly stolen from some of the slain settlers in the neighbourhood. As each savage received his portion, he drew back several paces and devoured it with the avidity of a wild animal.

The boys were walking slowly and had not yet reached the group, when Dick caught the arm of his companion and asked in a startled undertone,—

"Do you see *that* ?"

Only a few rods to one side, Osceola was observed talking earnestly with the treacherous African Steph, who evidently had just arrived in camp.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE PARTING.

NO more disquieting sight can be imagined than that of the evil negro in close converse with Osceola. Steph had lived in the Seminole country long enough to acquire the tongue, though, as has been shown, the chieftain was equally able to use the English language. The two were standing some paces from the fire nearest the creek, and apart from the other mongrels, who gave them scant attention. Their words were spoken in tones too low to be heard by the boys in the general confusion, but they did not need to know a syllable uttered to feel sure of the import of what was said.

The stupidity of the servant Cato saw now its full fruition. Steph had verified the suspicion of Osceola that Captain Moreton had left his secluded home for the purpose of joining the white forces in Florida, against whom the Seminole leader was resolved to wage implacable warfare. He had left his young son behind, though the fact that that same son was on his way out of the dangerous section

made it clear that the father feared the consequences to him of the discovery that must come sooner or later.

Dick, as well as his cousin, was in the power of Osceola, who deemed that he was unpardonably wronged and who could conjure up no outrage by way of retaliation that he felt was sufficient to balance the fearful account.

What would he do with the boys, and especially with Dick Moreton ?

It has been shown that this famous chief of the Seminoles, while possessing all the revengeful traits of his tribe, still was not always forgetful of his friends, and more than once proved in his strange career his gratitude to those who had helped him when he needed help. Thus he had two powerful and opposing emotions at odds in his breast, and who should say which should overcome the other ?

Osceola was well aware that Jack Raymore was a nephew of Captain Moreton, and any punishment visited upon the boy must react upon his relative, though of course not to the same degree as if his own son were the victim. The dread of Dick Moreton was that Osceola would spare him at the expense of his cousin's life, but his distress of heart held silent the thought.

Strange as it may seem, Jack Raymore believed directly the opposite. All his appetite vanished (as

did that of his cousin) when he saw Steph talking with the chief.

“ Osceola already knows the truth about Uncle Dick; he will forget in his anger that he has eaten at the same table, that he and Dick have roamed through the woods and hunted together, and that it was Dick more than I who gave him protection from the scout that would have held him at his mercy. I fear he will try to adjust matters with his conscience by sacrificing Dick and sparing me.” But Jack took good care that no intimation of this dread should fall from his lips.

“ By George! that ’s bad!” exclaimed Jack.

“ It is what I was afraid of from the moment I knew that Osceola meant to make us stay with him. Look at the fellow!”

Dick was not mistaken. Steph was standing so as to face them, and when his gaze rested on the boys, the expression on his ugly face said as plainly as so many words:

“ You played me a sharp trick last night, but I ’ve played a sharper one on you; neither of you will ever see friends or home again.”

Aye, the keen appetites of the youngsters had vanished, and they felt a loathing for the food that was offered them the next minute by a couple of Seminoles, who probably thought to please their leader by the act. The boys were wise, however,

in forcing themselves to eat, for there was no telling when a second opportunity would be offered. They were agreeably surprised to find that the slices of meat were cooked more than was the custom and were quite palatable. They ate until they could swallow no more, and even then were obliged to throw away a moiety of what had been given them.

The conference between Osceola and Steph did not continue long. The chief had probably learned all that he had wished, and had no further use for the fellow. Leaving him, he walked back among the Seminoles who were the leaders under him. The boys furtively watched him, but he did not appear to be aware of their presence. In their alarm, they put the worst construction upon this fact.

It was yet early in the day, when one of the deputies suddenly placed his hand to the side of his mouth and emitted a peculiar whoop, which must have rung and echoed for a long distance through the woods. What immediately followed proved that it was a proclamation or command for all to give attention, for its effect was marked. The talking and confusion ceased on the instant, and the whole two hundred of variegated hostiles flocked around the spot where Osceola stood, their eyes and attention fixed expectantly upon him. The chief acted becomingly. He stood proud and erect, his posture a singular but favourite one with him. He

grasped his rifle with his left hand near the muzzle at a height about the same as his shoulder, and held the weapon as far from his body as he could reach, so that the arm was extended horizontally. The butt of the gun rested on the ground, acting as a support for the arm. This left his right hand free for gesticulating. The attitude, as we have said, was a favourite one with Osceola, and there are men living at this writing who remember to have seen him assume it.

When not excited, the hand thus grasping his gun was motionless, though the fingers would occasionally clasp and unclasp. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other, but often stood absolutely stationary with the exception of the right arm and a slight movement of the head. It was in his moments of tumultuous emotion that he suddenly lifted the stock of his gun from the ground, sometimes to the height of a foot or more, and struck the earth violently, leaving a deep impression in the soil. He has been known to repeat this in quick succession for half a dozen times, with no insignificant risk to the weapon.

It was apparent before the chief opened his mouth that he intended to address his warriors. There was a peculiar glitter in his fine dark eyes and a glow on his swarthy face which (of mixed blood as he was) added to his attractiveness of appearance. Dick

Moreton, who had seen him when the prey of varying moods, was sure that he never knew until that moment what a remarkably handsome man he was.

He began his address in a clear voice, hardly above a conversational tone, every word of which was clearly enunciated and audible for ten times the distance of the farthest listener. Much to the disappointment of Dick and Jack, he spoke in his own tongue, so that the precise meaning of no single word was understood by them, but it seemed to both that they hardly lost a sentence.

They read his denunciation of the treaty of Payne's Landing; his passionate condemnation of the cheating and deception used by the white men; of the resolution of the pale-faces to drive them across the Mississippi to live among the Creeks, who were to be dreaded as much as the pale-faces themselves; of the defiance of the Seminoles and their determination to perish rather than submit further to injustice; of their contempt for the whites; their resolve to resist them to the last, and the certainty that hundreds of lives would help pay for the wrongs done the red man, closing with an appeal to his followers to use every means at their command to strike the detested ones anywhere and everywhere, granting no mercy to age or sex.

It was at the close of this remarkable address, which lasted about twenty minutes, that Osceola

was swept away by his own tempestuous emotion. The stock of the gun that had already done terrible execution among the abominated ones was repeatedly lifted and struck into the earth, and the last six or eight words were each punctuated in this emphatic manner, until there was real danger of the woodwork being wrecked. It passed through the ordeal, however, in safety, probably having become inured to it.

Keeping pace with his growing passion, the resounding voice rang out with penetrating clearness, echoing and re-echoing like the notes of a bugle among the forest arches, and swaying the listeners as if they were so many leaves torn by the tempests of autumn. All were eager to leap at the throats of the white men, and not a spark of pity would have been shown to the pleading mother or the helpless, innocent babe.

And throughout this impassioned, resistless appeal, two members of the white race were standing among the furious swarm, and some of them knew that the parent of one was doing all he could to complete the wrongs visited upon the Seminoles!

Why did n't the Indians and mongrels leap upon them as the tiger leaps upon the helpless lamb? What was it that restrained the awful outburst?

A single simple fact: Osceola had already stricken one of his party to the earth for making a hostile

movement against the youths. The chief was believed to be the friend of the prisoners, and the whole two hundred Indians, negroes, and mixed-breeds dreaded his anger more than they dreaded anything on earth.

Therefore, though they glared and scowled at the two boys standing apart with a calmness of bravery that hardly deceived them, no one dared so much as lift his hand against either.

Now took place another astonishing and wholly unexpected incident. Osceola paused for a full minute after completing his peroration, and with scowling brow glared savagely into the countenances which stared at him as if hypnotized. When the strange spell was at its profoundest depth, he suddenly swung his rifle aloft in a lightning-like circle about his head, and emitted a shout that seemed loud and piercing enough to wake the dead.

Instantly every man responded, the variety of voices and keys making a tempest of sound and discord that thrilled the boys and held them breathless with fear. Then, as if under one impulse, each man leaped into air, shouted and brandished his weapons, and broke into a headlong run directly for the forest. Like a troop of stampeded horses, they dashed among the trees and disappeared in a moment!

It was all so like a phantasm of sleep that Dick

and Jack looked bewilderingly around and into each other's faces.

They were entirely alone with the exception of one person. That person was Osceola, chief of the Seminoles. All his raging fury appeared to have fled with his swift-rushing warriors.

The youths felt it was no time for them to speak. As soon as they could rally their senses and recover from the daze into which they had been thrown they turned toward Osceola and waited for him to break the silence, all the more oppressive from the pandemonium that had preceded it.

"They have gone," said the chief in his ordinary voice; "they will not come back till they bring a hundred scalps of the pale-faces with them; they will not bring a hundred but a thousand! All the Seminoles have taken the war-path; there shall not be one pale-face left in Florida!"

Though this boast might well be gainsaid, neither Jack nor Dick felt it wise to express dissent. They therefore held their peace.

"*You* will go to your home."

This command was not addressed to both boys, but to Jack Raymore, for the chieftain not only fixed his piercing eyes upon him but indicated whom he meant by pointing his finger.

"Will *he* not go with me?" Jack ventured to ask, with an appealing look at his cousin.

“ No; he stays with me; you will go now.”

With a delicacy of feeling which did him credit, Osceola turned away his face and walked a few paces. He meant to give them opportunity for a few words, but only a few.

As Jack Raymore saw the back of the chief, a sudden impulse came upon him to raise his gun and press the trigger. It would be all over in an instant, leaving him and Dick free to renew their effort to get out of the perilous region.

But the temptation vanished as suddenly as it came. Perhaps Dick suspected the thought of his chum, for he shook his head and extended his hand.

“ It is best that we obey him; you have a good chance, Jack, to reach home; you know what dangers you will have to face; good-by.”

He extended his hand, which was warmly clasped and the response given. The boys would have said more, but Osceola had faced around again as if impatient. The parting was over and the cousins separated, little imagining what was in store for each.

CHAPTER XVI.

THROUGH THE FOREST ALONE.

THE parting between Jack and Dick, while satisfactory to both in one respect, was the opposite in another. They would have preferred to talk long enough to arrive at a fuller understanding, inasmuch as for a time Jack had to take one path and his cousin another. Both wished to arrange it so that, if feasible or possible, they could meet again, but the impatience of Osceola prevented, and they could only part with mutual prayers.

Obedying the stern orders of the chief, Jack flung his rifle over his shoulder and strode into the wood, not pausing until he knew he was beyond sight of his chum and his master. Then he stopped among the trees and looked around. Neither they nor any of the Seminoles were in sight.

A curious mental change in each boy must be noted. The conviction of Jack Raymore was that the action of Osceola had been prompted by a strong friendship for each.

“His warriors are in that excited state that he knows he will be unable to save us from a treacher-

ous death at the hands of some of them. They would n't dare attack either of us in his presence, but they would manage to do so some time when we were not under his eye. He feels a stronger friendship for Dick than for me. The safer course is to put me beyond reach of the Seminoles and half-breeds, and he lingered a few minutes behind them to do so. I am now free to look out for myself, with a fair chance of making my way out of the wilderness. Having only Dick to look after, Osceola will keep him under his wing and take as good care of him as if he were his own son. It will be much easier to do that with one boy than with two, and when a good opening comes, he will give Dick a chance to make his way to my home, which will be his for a good while to come. It is the best thing that could have happened to us."

It was a comfortable state of mind for Jack, and did much to reconcile him to the severance from his comrade, but the still more singular fact remains to be noted that Dick Moreton also underwent a change of views as to the relations of the three most concerned.

'Osceola's feelings have changed towards me,' was the conclusion of Dick, "since he has learned that father has enlisted. He is willing to let Jack go, but he has either determined to punish father through me or he has not yet fully made up his

mind as to what to do with me; but as Jack's safety has been secured, I am thankful."

No two comrades could have been more unselfish than Dick and Jack, and this was not the first time that one had stood ready to sacrifice himself for the other.

It now remained for Jack to decide upon the line to follow, and for a time we must give our attention to his adventures and experiences.

In one respect the situation was plain. His home, as has already been shown, was between twenty and thirty miles distant. It was a small town, hardly more than a village, which, having been founded during the Spanish occupation, was provided with a strong blockhouse, or fort, believed to be sufficient to repel any attack of the Seminoles. Standing close to the St. John's River, whose bank he had almost reached, there was no excuse for the youth going astray or becoming lost. He had but to follow the course of the stream to arrive at his home, and could he be permitted to journey directly forward, he ought to be there by set of sun.

But, as the reader knows, he was liable for the whole distance to meet some of the mongrels who were scattered through the greater part of the Territory, eager to find victims to their ferocity. Only by the greatest care and the utmost exercise of the woodcraft in which, despite his youth, he was an

expert, could he hope to thread his way through the labyrinth of peril in safety. The danger lurked in the woods, and there was no saying at what moment he would run into it.

"If this parting had only taken place last night," he mused, "I could have covered most of the way on foot or in one of the boats, but now I must face the sunlight."

He suddenly thought of the two craft still moored at the side of the stream, where they had been left by Osceola, Dick, and himself. Why not make use of one of them?

He had taken a few steps with the resolve of doing so, when he was abruptly checked by a discovery that proved a good lesson to him. The sound of blows caused him to pause for a minute or two, when, unable to learn the cause, he picked his way forward for a few steps, until, by parting the undergrowth with one hand, he was able to peer through and find the explanation he sought.

It was Pete Guinness whom he saw demolishing the boats with an iron hatchet. The miscreant had recovered from the chastisement given him by Osceola, who possibly left him behind to complete the work on which he was now engaged. His sturdy blows had already shattered several of the narrow boards that composed the bottom of the scow, so that the water flowed through freely. With one

foot he shoved it out into the stream, where, when half filled, it floated, from its own buoyancy, and began drifting with the current. Its usefulness was destroyed until repaired, and no means of repairing it was within reach.

The dugout was a stronger craft, being only a large log hollowed out, but Pete promptly met the demands of the occasion. Vigorously wielding his hatchet, he succeeded in chopping a huge V in one side, extending so near the bottom of the boat that it could not have supported a weight of twenty pounds without filling. A push with one of his bare feet sent the dugout to keep company with the crippled flatboat.

Then, having completed his mischief, Pete stood up, with a huge grin on his ugly face and looked around as if in quest of some one to commend his action. Before his eyes were turned in the direction of Jack, the latter allowed the parted bushes gently to close and squatted down. Too many members of Osceola's band were in the vicinity for the youth to risk an encounter with Pete, whom he could have shot with slight compunction of conscience.

Determined to avoid a meeting, the youth held his position for perhaps ten minutes, during which the silence was unbroken. Then he slowly straightened up and bending forward noiselessly parted the

undergrowth and peered through. The negro had disappeared.

"Now, why did the scamp do that?" asked the disgusted Jack; "he did n't see Osceola send me off by myself, but he must have suspected something of the kind, and he meant that I should n't be able to make any further use of either boat. He knows now that when he and the rest look for me they must do it in the woods. Come to think of it, I believe it is the best thing, after all, that could have happened."

There was no doubt of it. To attempt to pass down the tributary of the river and the river itself, in open daylight, with numberless enemies on both shores, must have resulted in discovery, and discovery inevitably meant death. There might be hope of success at night but none by daylight, a fact which undoubtedly would have impressed itself upon the lad before he took the step.

The problem, therefore, became simple: how should he pass the intervening distance to his home, nearly all of which was through pine woods and abundant undergrowth and vegetation?

Manifestly there was but one thing to do—do it. He asked himself whether it would not be more prudent to postpone the attempt until night, when he would have the invaluable help of darkness, but it was impossible to sit down and await in idleness

the passage of the slow hours. It was yet early in the day and time was precious. Within five minutes after the discovery of the departure of the negro, Jack had headed northward, and was threading his way through the wilderness with a stealth like that of Osceola himself.

The reader is perhaps familiar with a strange error which the most experienced veterans of the woods sometimes commit when they undertake to journey for any distance without the help of compass or landmarks. It seems impossible to prevent traveling in an extended circle that eventually brings one back to his starting-point. The most reasonable explanation of this curious tendency is that, since almost every person is either right- or left-handed, he unconsciously exerts one leg more than the other when walking in an aimless manner.

While Jack Raymore was without any of the aids named, he had another that was equally valuable. A short distance away flowed the river, whose course, if followed long enough, must take him home. He decided to keep near that, for progress was as easy there as deeper in the forest. By halting now and then, even though the water was not in sight, he could catch the soft ripple made against the dipping limbs on the bank, and thus was never without an unerring guide.

Not once did he relax his watchfulness. He

acted as if he knew a company of hostiles were encamped in his path or lying in ambush, and only by the greatest care could he hope to flank them. After walking a dozen or a score of steps he would pause, and peering in every direction, listen intently for sounds that might mean a good deal or nothing. He glanced up at the whirring birds as they flashed through the tree-tops, or, perching on one of the upper limbs, curiously surveyed him as he passed underneath, ready to take wing upon the slightest demonstration on his part; his heart throbbed when he suddenly paused at the sound of what he believed to be the footsteps of an Indian, but which he knew a minute later was that of some wild animal, slinking off before he could catch sight of it, and not until assured that that was gone and out of the way did he resume his painstaking progress.

He had reached a place in the wood where the ground was more depressed, and so soft and spongy that he sank in the earth, with the moisture oozing into his shoes. That, however, was a small matter, and he gave it no attention, but kept unremitting watch of his surroundings. It was when his nerves were in this tense state that he received a startling shock.

He was making his way through this region, which seemed to have been visited by a hurricane or cyclone at some former period, for fully one half

the trees lay prostrate, many of them overlapping one another, while all were askew and jumbled together in striking confusion.

Jack mounted one of the prostrate trunks with the intention of jumping to the next, when he halted abruptly upon hearing a threatening growl directly in front of where he stood, and in fact from behind the tree upon which he was almost in the act of leaping. He brought his gun around to fire, when a sinewy panther reared itself with its paws on the trunk, which, resting upon another, sloped upward from the base, and looked across at the intruder.

As the brute stood on its hind legs, its head was raised to the highest elevation possible, so that it appeared larger than it really was. Its eyes, even in the bright daylight, showed the phosphorescent glitter of its species; and its formidable mouth was opened, revealing the red tongue, jaws, and gleaming teeth. Its appearance was frightful enough, but it was intensified by the warning, cavernous growl that issued from its throat.

Jack Raymore had met panthers before, and more than one of them had fallen victim to his marksmanship. The moment he identified the beast his fear vanished, but he did not wish to fire, though confident that one shot would give him his quietus. The report might bring those to the spot who were a hundredfold more dangerous than any quadrupeds.



But the youth was aware also that it would not do for him to turn about and run. The panther would be upon him in an instant. He must either hold his ground or cautiously withdraw with his face to the foe.

“ If you ’ll let *me* alone I won’t bother *you*,” he said, as if the brute could understand the proposal; “ but if you try any of your tricks, I ’ll send a bullet right through that skull of yours.”

For two or three minutes the couple faced each other, motionless and prepared for the first offensive movement. The panther—popularly known as “ painter ”—still stood reared on its hind legs, its keen claws resting on the trunk of the tree, and occasionally growling and muttering, as if taking the measure of its foe, and debating whether to make a single bound that would carry it clear over the intervening space, or to whirl about and skurry away.

This tableau could not continue indefinitely. There must be a giving-way by one of the figures, and Jack was inclined to take the initiative, but was restrained by the fear that if he attempted to move backward, keeping his gaze upon the beast, he might catch his heel in some vine or obstruction. In that event the panther would be upon him before he could rise, besides which it was necessary that his withdrawal should be so gradual that the creature would not notice it. Nevertheless, he decided to

make the effort, when the situation was suddenly changed by the unexpected action of the brute.

With a peculiar snarl, it bounded over the tree toward Jack, who brought his gun to his shoulder to fire, but before he could aim the animal made a second leap to one side and was gone in a twinkling. It acted as if wounded, though such could not have been the fact, but it was evident that something besides the presence of the youth had scared it away.

What could it be ? It was a puzzling question, but Jack was convinced that the cause was on the other side of the tree, and therefore invisible to him.

The only prudent course for the youth was to make a detour that would take him around and beyond the danger ; but was there ever a boy who did not possess a strong curiosity ? He was determined to know what it was that gave the panther its fright.

Instead, however, of advancing directly to the point where his foe had been standing a short time before, Jack circled to the right, stepping with the utmost care, often pausing and listening, but unable to detect any sound. The space to be travelled was so short that it was quickly passed. When nigh enough to touch the trunk he stood motionless for several minutes, his sight and hearing strained to the acutest point.

The fact that he was still in the dark as to the

explanation of the singular occurrence whetted his curiosity, and the next minute he made a light bound that landed him on the prostrate trunk, and as he did so he came nearer death than at any time in all his previous life.

Coiled on the ground, directly in front of him, was an enormous specimen of the *crotalus*, or rattlesnake. It was near enough to strike, and snapped back its triangular head to do so, but, quick as it was, the boy with a gasp of affright bounded backward to the ground, and ran several steps before checking himself and whirling around.

The tree hid the reptile from sight, but he knew it was there, for the buzzing sounded incessantly, though it was the first time Jack heard it. It was strange that he missed the terrible warning which must have frightened the panther into precipitate flight, for it is well known that the frightful serpent always gives notice of its intended blow when the chance is presented.

Perhaps it is fortunate that nearly every human being feels such a detestation of all kinds of serpents that at sight of one the impulse to slay becomes almost irrestrainable. Jack Raymore was quite willing to allow the panther to escape, but he compressed his lips and resolved that the venomous thing should perish, no matter what might be the result of the report of his gun.

No serpent is more easily killed than the rattlesnake. A slight blow is sufficient, the snap of a whip-lash sometimes being fatal, while the ordinary black snake will attack and kill several rattlers in succession. Jack hunted around for a stone, but could not find any. Then he looked for a long branch that might be trimmed so as to be effective, but the immense size of the snake gave him a distrust that he would not have experienced with an ordinary specimen. No doubt he could have slain the horrible snake while at a safe distance, but naturally no man willingly takes any chances in the presence of the most fearful of American serpents.

Raising the hammer of his rifle, he moved carefully around the base of the tree, making sure that a goodly distance intervened between him and the rattler which he saw lying in coil, as he first perceived it. It was quick to discover its foe, and with its elevated tail vibrating so rapidly that the point looked like mist, it held its head ready to make its lightning-like stroke the instant the youth came within reach. Bringing his gun to his shoulder, Jack aimed straight at the head and let fly.

Although an expert marksman for one of his years, it required no special skill to shatter the target, which vanished as if cleaved off by the sweep of a scimiter, and the coils began furiously writhing and whipping the ground. Jack had done what he

conceived to be his duty, and, without waiting to see the last struggle, he hurried a few paces, when he paused and reloaded his weapon.

“ I don’t suppose it was a wise thing to do, but I could n’t help it,” was his thought, as he resumed his tramping through the wood. “ There are a good many ugly customers in the Florida wilds, and there are moccasin and other poisonous snakes, but there is none I hate like the rattler. I wonder if the mate of that one is anywhere around ? ”

Passing a few rods, he concluded that if the other reptile was in the neighbourhood he had nothing to fear from it, and dismissed it from his thoughts.

The incident being closed, a former oppressive feeling returned. Although he knew that hundreds of Seminoles and mixed-breeds were roaming through the country hunting for white people, yet, after his last sight of Pete Guinness, the negro, he had not heard the faintest sound to indicate the fact. He had expected to hear the reports of guns in different directions, mingled perhaps with the discordant war-cries of the hostiles, but there was nothing of the kind. It was as if he were in the midst of a boundless solitude in which he was the only living human being.

This was the more remarkable, when he knew there were settlers’ houses scattered throughout the section. Many of the people must have remained,

and assuredly they were doomed to fall victims to the enmity of Osceola and his followers. The continued deep silence oppressed, as we have said, the spirits of the youth, as is natural when one is in the presence of a danger whose nature is not understood.

This feeling, however, was displaced for a time by a more acute one, which had reference to the possible effects of his imprudent firing of his gun. The report must have penetrated to a considerable distance, and if by chance it reached the ears of any Seminoles nothing was more likely than that they would look into the cause.

Moreover, as will be remembered, the ground near the spot was so boggy that his footprints were clearly revealed. The acute red men would be quick to recognize them as those of a white youth (because of their small size) and would set out to trail him. Their woodcraft enabled them to do this in any part of the forest, but the work was of necessity slow on the higher and more elevated ground where the signs were less distinct. He regretted his haste in shooting the rattler, but the mischief was done and he could only make the best of it.

As the readiest means of baffling any pursuers, he changed his course so as to reach the highest ground attainable and advanced as lightly as possible. When he came to a fallen tree, as quite often happened, he walked its entire length from base to

limb, and then stepping carefully off, changed his direction, being guided for the time by what woodmen term the "lay of the land." Thus it inevitably came about that he made many changes in the line of his flight, though he did not forget to keep in mind, so far as was possible, the points of the compass.

As nearly as he could judge, he had reached a point about a half-mile from the spot where he shot the rattler, when he concluded that all cause for fear had disappeared. He had given more attention to the rear than the front, but by keeping upon elevated ground and using every possible precaution in walking he believed he had thrown off his trail any and all enemies that might have undertaken to follow it.

He now approached another space that had been devastated by some violent gust of wind that brought many of the trees to the ground. There was more undergrowth and therefore a better chance for concealment, when he sat down on one of the prostrate trunks, first making sure that no more foes like the one he had despatched were coiled near and waiting for him to come within striking distance.

Like all country youths in those days, Jack Raymore was obliged to depend upon the position of the sun to tell the time of day, and looking upward, he was convinced of two truths—it was near noon, and he was excessively hungry.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED SHOT.

ABOUT the time that these two truths dawned upon Jack Raymore, he became aware of another which promptly dissipated the one last named.

From some point behind him and slightly to the left came a low, tremulous whistle that might have been readily mistaken for the call of a bird to its mate.

“ It ’s a Seminole ! ” was the startled thought of the youth, as, turning on his seat, he looked keenly in the direction whence issued the alarming sound. While still watching, a precisely similar whistle sounded from the wood in front, but also to the left, so that those who had emitted them were almost precisely opposite each other.

Not doubting that these signals had reference to him, Jack partly rose to his feet with his glance flitting from side to side, in front and the rear, for he was determined that no one should steal a march on him.

He had stood thus but a minute, when something flickered among the trees in the direction whence

came the first whistle. While he looked, he saw two Seminoles walking one behind the other, with a pace as rapid as his own had been. Without waiting to observe more, Jack dropped down behind the tree and lay flat on the ground, where a person ten feet distant would not have perceived him.

Only one fact gave him hope. The two warriors whom he had discovered were not following his trail, for they were too far off in the direction of the river. It looked as if they had kept to the footprints from where they were first seen near what was left of the *crotalus*, but, finding the task too difficult when the dryer and more compact soil was reached, they had given it up and pushed on in the general direction of the course of the youth, hoping by this means to overtake him.

But for that signal they must have done so; for the fugitive, as he may be considered, having dismissed all misgiving, was proceeding with less attention to the rear, and was liable to be discovered at any moment.

It was hard for Jack to understand how the Seminoles who had answered the call had gotten round in his front, for it was not to be believed that they had done so in the attempt to surround him. It was more probable that they were roaming through the wood, and the signal which they answered was made at a venture. Be that as it may, it was im-

pressive proof of the numbers of his enemies who were on every hand, and of the enormous difficulty that confronted him in his attempt to reach home by pressing forward by daylight.

“ If they don’t discover me, I ’ll stay here till night,” was his decision; “ there ’s no use of my trying to reach home when the sun is shining, and I don’t understand how it is I have n’t run against some of them before this.”

It need not be said that the following half-hour or more was of the most trying nature to the young man lying on the ground behind the fallen tree. For a long while he was afraid to raise his head sufficiently to peep over, fearing that one of the Seminoles was standing within a few feet of the spot, with his eyes roving keenly over every square foot in the effort to discover his hiding-place. If so, he would detect the crown of the boy before the latter could see him.

Knowing how much more readily sounds travel through the earth than the air, Jack pressed his ear against the ground and held it thus for several minutes. He was in despair the first time, when he was sure he detected a guarded footstep near at hand; but, with a feeling that was not without a tinge of amusement, despite his critical position, he was compelled to admit that the whole thing was imagination on his part.

The fact that repeated attempts thus to locate his enemies failed resulted finally in the courage to rise to a crouching posture, and, with his hat removed, to peer here and there and on all sides of him. He could see nothing of any Seminoles, though that might be the fact with the whole party within stone's throw. He was too prudent, despite his anxiety to reach home, to venture from his hiding-place, and was earnest in his resolve to remain where he was until night once more closed in upon the forest.

With never a doubt that this was the true course to adopt, the youth lay down beside the tree trunk that had served him as a hiding-place and composed his body and limbs for sleep. It will be recalled that he had secured only a part of the rest needed the night before, besides which he was somewhat wearied from his long walk. Furthermore, the hunger that had troubled him was much less keen than at first, all of which being thus, it will not be wondered that he speedily sank into a refreshing slumber that was not broken until the afternoon was half gone. Then he opened his eyes, sat up and looked around, and in the course of a minute or two was able to recall where he was.

His next act was to remove his hat and take a careful survey of his surroundings. So far as he could discover, not the least danger threatened.

The belief was reasonable, for if the Seminoles had been on his trail they must have discovered him long before when he was sleeping.

There could be no doubt of one fact,—the hunger which Jack felt before the appearance of the Seminoles, when compared to his present gnawing yearning, was like a summer breeze to a cyclone. He was certain that never before had he known the real pangs of starvation. He had gone without food a long time when hunting, and he had eaten to some extent of the food furnished by Osceola's party early that morning, so that it may be said he had missed but a single meal, but no force of reasoning could drive away the terrific longing for food which now got hold of him.

"I am not much nearer home than when I started," he mused; "and I shall never live to reach there unless I get something to eat."

With the waggery that sometimes manifested itself, under the most trying situations, he looked down at his strong shoes.

"I wonder what sort of a meal *they* would make; I believe I could eat one of them and relish it, but I should n't relish going barefooted."

Although Florida is noted for its abundance of fruits, there was none that he could discover in the woods around him that was palatable. He chewed the leaves of sassafras, and after having swallowed

a considerable lot was relieved to find the intolerable gnawing sensibly lessened. He braced up, took courage, and resolved to stand it at least until the morrow, when, if worst came to worst, he would masticate and swallow more leaves.

Although several hours of daylight remained, he decided not to wait until night before pressing forward. He recognized the landmarks that were impressed upon him while on guard against the Seminoles, and was confident of following the right course. As he judged, he was within a third or a fourth of a mile of the St. John's, and to prevent any mistake, he concluded to make his way to the stream and then carry out his original intention of using it as a guide.

It would be wise not to keep close to the shore, since he was likely to meet some of his enemies there, but an occasional glimpse of the water among the trees would serve his purpose.

The distance to be passed seemed much longer than he anticipated. He was sure he had tramped the greater part of a mile, before he detected the familiar reflection of the broad stream flowing between its wooded banks. He went no nearer, but turning aside, so as to follow a parallel course, he was confident of covering six or eight miles before night closed in.

Fully aware of the risk incurred by this violation

of the plan formed earlier in the day, Jack made amends by using all possible precaution. As before, he never walked far without coming to a pause, and scrutinizing every point of the compass and listening with a closeness of attention that did not permit the slightest noise to escape him.

It was because of this intensity of caution that, before he had gone far, and while the sun was still in the sky, he detected a footfall which caused him to leap behind the nearest tree, not doubting that the Seminoles had again gotten on his track.

But once more he was mistaken. Some fifty feet distant a huge black wolf had come to an abrupt halt, and, with his head raised, was looking ahead, as if wondering what had become of the plump boy over whom, in anticipation of a delicious supper, he had been smacking his chops. One moment he was plodding along in front of the brute, and the next it was as if he had dropped down a well a thousand feet deep. It was altogether beyond the comprehension of the animal.

No more tempting mark could have been presented, as the beast stood motionless with head raised, turning his head slowly from side to side in quest of his prospective meal that was, and now was not. The lad yearned to bring his weapon to his shoulder and double up the creature like a jack-knife, but he did not forget the panther.

"I don't care about wasting any powder on you, but it is n't safe to tempt me too far," reflected the youth.

Suddenly he made a leap from behind the tree, swung his hat over his head, and with a suppressed shout, started on a rapid run straight toward the wolf. Had the latter known enough to stand his ground, this charge would have ended before it was half completed, but the brute was never so astonished in his life. The species are among the most cowardly that exist, and when this specimen saw the youth bearing down upon him, he came near breaking his neck in his haste to whirl about and make off at the top of his speed. He ran fast and quickly disappeared among the trees.

Jack, however, knew better than to suspect that was the last of him. He would stop running as soon as it looked safe, and then would sneak back on his trail, ready to fly if again threatened, and equally ready to pounce upon the youth if he lay down to sleep or was off his guard. Many a wounded buffalo or lonely hunter has been followed in that way for twenty-four hours and then succumbed at last.

The youth knew the animals so well that he felt little fear of the one that was dogging him. Had he been accompanied by ten or twenty others, they might have mustered sufficient courage to make an attack, but a single one would never dare do it

unless under the circumstances named. Moreover, the wolves in Florida are much less to be feared than those of Canada and the Northern States, where the severe winters often give them a fierceness altogether foreign to their nature.

One of the most trying of situations is the knowledge that an enemy is dogging your footsteps, and that it is out of your power to elude him. It is more than likely that Jack Raymore would have become so annoyed, as the gathering gloom increased, that he would have closed the business by shooting the brute, had not some one else done it for him.

When he looked around and saw the wolf sneaking after him again, farther back than before, as if trying to escape attention, he made another feint and away the beast skurried, apparently believing the pursuit this time would be a long one. Instead of following, Jack again placed himself behind the trunk of a tree, where he intended to conceal himself until the wolf came nigh enough to shoot him.

One cause of this decision was that it was already growing dark in the forest, so that if the report of his gun again attracted the attention of prowling red men, they would have great difficulty in locating him. His trail could not be followed, and he was confident of his ability to keep out of their reach.

But the minutes passed and the wolf failed to show up. It looked as if he had been terrified into a permanent absence, but Jack knew the nature of the *lupus* species too well to count on anything like that. He held his position motionless, but on the alert, when to his amazement the crack of a rifle broke the stillness, accompanied by a snarling yelp which left no possible doubt that the wolf had played the part of target and the marksman had made a bull's-eye.

"Well, this is growing interesting," reflected the startled Jack Raymore; "I don't think I shall wait any longer for that particular wolf nor for the one who shot him."

Slipping from behind his shelter, the youth made all haste through the wood, anxious to get as far as possible from the spot without any delay that could be avoided.

And yet had Jack Raymore but known who it was that shot the wolf, he would have run with all speed in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SURPRISE.

JACK RAYMORE was in too much of a hurry to get away from the spot to pay special attention to the direction he took. All that he made certain of was that he was running from the point whence came the report of the gun and the yelp of the wolf that had been slain. He ran with a recklessness that brought more than one mishap. He collided with the protruding branch of a limb that nearly lifted him off his feet, and a few minutes later was unable to avoid a tree that got in his way and almost knocked him senseless.

By this time, however, he had traversed a considerable distance, and, panting with the exertion, he paused and listened. The silence was as profound as before and the straining vision revealed no shadowy form coming like a whirlwind in his footsteps. Twilight was rapidly deepening into night, and it was not hard to convince himself that the peril from which he had fled impended no more.

"I have had several pretty close calls to-day," he murmured with a glow of thankfulness; "but I

hope that is the last of them for the night. If I only had a good meal, there would n't be many miles left between me and my home by sunrise. I wonder how Dick is getting on. No doubt Osceola is taking good care of him and I am glad he has n't had any experience like mine."

And yet had Jack Raymore but known the truth about Dick Moreton, his meditations would have been of a far different nature.

Despite his situation and the necessity of improving every minute, the hunger that had seized Jack could not be forgotten, nor its insatiate demands resisted. He would have eaten more leaves and bark, but was afraid to do so; for many of the vegetable growths in Florida, as he well knew, are poisonous, and he could not feel sure in the dark of not making a fatal blunder. He had his box of matches, but to strike one of them was liable to draw the attention of some prowling Indian. This was an excuse of which the youth was glad to avail himself, for, despite his craving, he felt a loathing for the crude substitute for food that had stayed his pangs for a time.

While these painful musings were passing through his brain, he was walking forward, alert and watchful, but convinced that he now had less cause for fear than at any time since parting from Dick Moreton and Osceola.

To his astonishment, he perceived soon afterward that the forest was growing more open in front, and pressing on, he suddenly debouched into a clearing of several acres' extent. By the star-gleam (for the moon would not rise until late and the sky was as clear as crystal) he perceived that the clearing was cultivated, and in the midst stood a small log cabin, within which a light was gleaming.

Jack was amazed beyond measure, for, although quite familiar with the country between his own home and that of his cousin, he did not identify the place. He saw that the building was small, and the corn and vegetables appeared to have been gathered long before, for it was late in the season, and fruit ripens in those parts much earlier than in the more temperate States.

But here was a dwelling and it had occupants at that moment. Surely they could know nothing of the danger that threatened them. They were in the midst of the hostile district, and the wonder was that the house had not been burned and all the people killed long before. With the Seminoles so near, surely it would soon be impossible for them to escape.

Two powerful emotions controlled Jack Raymore. One was that it was his duty to go forward and warn the family to flee without delay. An hour or even less might prove too late for them to save

themselves. His second emotion was the hope that by moving promptly in the matter he might obtain something to eat.

It would be thought that a youth swayed by these impulses would lose little time in hurrying across the clearing and presenting himself to the family; but Jack had lived too long on the frontier to forget in one minute all his training. Suppose the hostiles had already made their visit, and the light which he saw twinkling through the window belonged to them?

Clearly a little reconnoitring was necessary, and he proceeded to make it. Keeping well back on the edge of the clearing, he moved softly around the cabin until he had completed a circle, which took in the structure that answered for a barn, and which contained a number of domestic fowls.

It cannot be said that he added much by this to his store of knowledge. At certain points, while making his circuit, the light disappeared, but this was due to his own change of position. Each of the windows, at the front and rear, was obscured by a curtain that shut out all view of the interior. He heard the sounds of no voices, nor of any one stirring. He was in some fear that a big dog might charge upon him, but even that evidence of life did not present itself.

The conclusion was that it was idle to throw away

any more time. He must either advance and make himself known or pass on. It was extremely unreasonable that any red men were inside, and, stepping softly to the front door, he twitched the string, pushed the awkward structure inward, and stepped across the threshold.

Another surprise greeted him. The only occupant of the room was an enormous negress, sitting at a table and eating her supper of pone bread, broiled chicken, and fragrant coffee. No men or children were in sight, and the cooking had all been done in the old-fashioned fireplace at one side of the small apartment.

The head of the woman was wrapped around with a gorgeous bandana handkerchief; she was intensely black, and her proportions were mountainous. She was in the act of drinking a bowl of coffee as Jack entered, and her big, round eyes shone with astonishment as she stared over the edge of the cup at her visitor, but she kept on drinking, gradually elevating the bottom of the vessel until it was turned toward the ceiling, when she set it down with a grunt of satisfaction and said:

“ Good-ebenin’ ! whar d’ yo’ come from ? ”

“ I was passing by and felt so hungry that I thought maybe you would let me have something to eat; I have a little money with me and will pay you.”

"G' way, chile, what yo' talkin' 'bout? Sot right up hyeah and stuff yo'self till yo' can't hold another mouf full. Yo' looks peaked and starving like."

"And that 's the way I feel," replied the delighted Jack, grasping a stool and placing himself on the opposite side of the table, where the hostess quickly laid a tin plate for him, waddling about the room like a vast porpoise, grunting with the exertion, but happy to do a kindness to any one. Furthermore, like many of her race, she was a natural cook, with a skill that in its way could not be surpassed. The meal that she set on that plain deal table in the wretched but tiny cabin would have tempted the palate of an epicure. Remembering the famishing condition of Jack Raymore, it will be believed that never before nor since that night did he partake of a banquet which he considered the equal of the one furnished by the bulky negress, who, as she moved ponderously around announced her name as Dinah, one of the most common among her people.

The moment the boy looked into her big, jolly face, he realized the grotesque mistake he had made. One of his reasons for entering the cabin was to warn the family to lose no time in leaving the neighborhood, but, curiously enough, it had never occurred to him that the owner of the

place might be an African, to whom such a warning would be in the nature of a jest, for it has already been made clear that in the Seminole war the negroes and mixed-breeds made common cause with the red men, their interests being the same, and more than one African proved as merciless as the Indians themselves in the numerous conflicts that accompanied that revolt.

It may be said that the situation of no person could have been safer than that of Dinah. She was a friend of the Seminoles and mongrels, none of whom would offer her molestation, while her sex protected her from disturbance at the hands of the white soldiers. The war might rage all around her, but she could eat her delicious meals and do her sewing, odd chores, and general housework in peace. Jack Raymore had far more reason to look after his own safety than he had to be concerned about anything that could possibly befall the colored woman.

Jack never felt more comfortable in his life. Following the Southern custom, he addressed the woman as "Auntie" instead of "Dinah." Drawing some money from his pocket, he said :

"Auntie, that's the best meal I ever ate; I won't offend you by offering to pay for it, but you must let me make you a little present," and he rose from his stool, and passing around the side of the table,

laid a silver dollar before her. She looked at the shining coin, then at him, and rising heavily from her seat, waddled to where he was standing and gave him a resounding cuff on his ear.

“Yo’ can’t fool yo’ aunty dat way! I won’t tech de money; pick it up right off and put it back in yo’ pocket! Do yo’ hyah me?”

Although Jack’s ear was ringing, for the blow was a vigorous one, he was immensely tickled. Ducking his head before the fat hand which swung threateningly to one side, like the fin of a fish, he meekly walked to where the coin lay and returned it to his pocket.

“I beg your pardon, Aunty; I won’t do so again,” he said humbly.

“Reckon yo’ bettah not; does yo’ yarn to make me a present, chile?”

“I should like to do so very much.”

“Bery well; I’ll show yo’ what am a Christ’n present.”

Swinging to a small stand at the side of the room, she picked up a pair of shears, large enough to serve in clipping the wool from sheep, stepped back to where he stood wonderingly watching her, and before he read her purpose, severed a lock of hair from his temple.

“Gracious, Aunty! you may cut off all the hair I have if you wish.”

"None ob yo' imperdence," she replied with another demonstration of one of her hands, while the youth again ducked and covered both ears. Then she held the curly golden lock up in the candle-light.

"Jes' like de hair I used to hab when I was a gal,—soft and yaller and fine as silk."

She smoothed it fondly, and then with gentle care laid it down on the stand with the shears beside it.

"I would n't take four tousand hundred dollars fur dat—what yo' larfin' at?"

"Nothing, nothing, Aunty; wait till I get over that cuff you gave me, before you let me have another; your hand feels as if it weighs a ton."

All of Dinah's pugnaciousness vanished. She sank slowly down on the stool which Jack had vacated, and her broad face expanded into one immense grin. She completely hid the support, and folded her arms, which resembled the legs of a piano, below her ample bosom, where they fitted the huge concavity.

"Who am yo', chile?"

"My name is Jack Raymore, and I live about twenty miles down the river."

"What yo' doin' in dis part ob de wuhl?"

"My cousin, Dick Moreton, lives ten miles or so up the St. John's, where I often visit him; I am

returning from a call there now," explained the youth, who thought it better not to give particulars. Dinah sat silent for a moment or two, as if the time was necessary for her to digest this information. It was evident that she had taken a fancy to her caller, though she may have resorted to a peculiar method of showing it.

" Say dem words agin, sonny, and say 'em slow like."

Jack had sat down in the chair previously occupied by her, and he carefully elaborated the information given a few minutes before. Gratitude prompted him to do everything he could for her, but he began to ask himself whether he was not acting imprudently in thus lingering within the enemy's lines.

As if divining his thoughts, she said,—

" Chile, I 'd like to hab yo' stay wid me till yo' got hungry agin, so dat I co'd feed yo' till yo' busted, but yo' 'd better be hurryin' home."

" You are right, for I know this is not a safe place for me."

" Yes it am, fuh I 'd like to see anybody lay hands on yo' while yo' am in my keer, but dar am lots ob trash in de woods dat mought do yo' harm. When I sees Pete I 'll tell him to handle yo' keerful."

" Whom do you mean by Pete ?"

“ Why, my husband ; who do yo’ s’pose I means ? ”

“ What is his last name ? ”

“ Guinness—Pete Guinness—bress his soul, dar he comes dis minute ! ”

CHAPTER XIX.

PETE.

JACK RAYMORE had caught the sound of a heavy footstep while Dinah was speaking, the latch-string was pulled, the door pushed inward, and Pete Guinness entered. It may be doubted which countenance,—his or the lad's,—expressed the most astonishment when they looked at each other.

The negro closed the door behind him and stood staring in silent amazement at the visitor, who being the first to recover, rose to his feet with a half-military salute and said cheerily,—

“ How do you do, Pete ? ”

“ Whar yo' come from ? ” asked the African, still staring at him.

By this time, Dinah concluded it was her duty to demonstrate that she was present. She plunged forward on her chair several times until she got the centre of gravity right, when she rose, charged across the floor, and yanked off the dilapidated hat from her husband's head.

“ Whar 's yo' manners ? Doan' yo' see dar 's a gemman hyah ? ”

Pete must have been familiar with that good right hand of his wife, for he shrank to one side, lowering his head and blinking as if he expected a ringing cuff.

" 'Scoos me; I done forgot myself," he said; " I 'se glad to see yo'."

Jack reciprocated the greeting and decided to make the best of the peculiar situation. He said pleasantly,—

" I was passing your cabin, when I saw the light from within; I was half starved to death and asked Aunty if she would let me have something to eat."

" Did she do 't ?" inquired the husband, proudly, well aware that the question was a superfluity.

" She gave me the best supper I ever had; I wanted to pay her partly for it, but only succeeded in offending her."

Pete's look left no doubt that it would have been impossible to offend him by any such means, but he prudently kept his thoughts to himself.

" I think, however," added Jack, " that there 's been something left for you."

" Am yo' hungry, Pete ?" asked the wife sympathizingly.

" Feel as if I had n't eat nuffin in eighteen weeks and a half," and without any more invitation, the husband dropped into his seat and began his meal with the greediness of a wild animal. All the time

he kept glancing out of the tail of his eye at his wife and their visitor, who were now seated on opposite sides of the little room. Suddenly Dinah seesawed herself to her feet, walked to the table to reach something to her partner, and then swung round like a railway turntable and heaved back toward her chair again.

The instant her back was turned, Pete began to make hurried signs to Jack. He twiddled his fingers as if speaking the deaf and dumb alphabet and had much to say and only a few seconds to say it in, at the same time shaking his head from side to side with a vigour that threatened to dislocate his neck. The youth interpreted these signals as an appeal to him to make no reference in the presence of Dinah to the affair of the morning, when Osceola found it necessary to interfere. Jack responded by several nods to signify that he understood and would do as desired.

“What yo’ winkin’ and blinkin’ at?” demanded Dinah, who had managed to veer about a trifle sooner than expected by her husband; “am yo’ makin’ fun ob me?”

“He was n’t doing anything of the kind,” interposed Jack, anxious to avert the threatening domestic storm.

“I ketched a chicken bone in my froat,” explained Pete, gaping and making wry faces, as if he

had not yet gotten over the trouble; " ef I had n't been quick yo 'd been luff a lone widder, Dine."

" Am yo' all right now, Pete ? "

" I guess so," he replied, deeming it wise to taper off slowly with his grimaces, " but I 'se larned to be keerful."

" Yas; I 've knowed hogs to choke demselves to def afore to-night."

Pete had resumed his meal and cast a reproachful glance at his spouse, but did not deem it best to make any response to this insinuation. Besides, it was difficult to talk intelligibly and do full justice to the food.

This domestic scene was pleasant enough in its way, but it possessed a grim background that was most disquieting to Jack Raymore, who, without attracting notice to himself, had shifted his seat nearer the door, within reach of his rifle which he had leaned there, Pete doing the same with his own weapon. Despite, however, the apparent truce between the two, Jack did not trust the negro, whose face was that of as treacherous a miscreant as the worst of Osceola's Seminoles. The youth could not forget the hideous gleam of that black countenance when he was crouching knife in hand to spring upon him and was only restrained by the wrath of the dusky leader. The ferocity pictured on the face was like that of the jungle tiger, and it was still in

his heart. It was the dominating presence of Dinah that restrained a struggle to the death. The husband held her in dread, and would not dare to make any movement against the youth while in her presence. His anxiety to keep all knowledge of the affair of the morning from her was proof of that.

The question Jack Raymore was debating was as to the best manner of withdrawing from the place. Pete had joined the rush of the war party in the morning and his return to his home on the evening of the same day made it probable that some of his associates were near. Possibly they would soon call, in which event it would not do for the youth to be there. They would show none of the husband's fear and deference towards Dinah. His remembrance of the day's experiences forbade him to hope for a clear path to his home.

Jack decided on a shrewd line. He would sound Pete in the hope of gaining some desirable knowledge from him, and then abruptly leave, as if he had suddenly awakened to the fact that he was losing valuable time.

"Pete, I am sorry to hear that there is going to be war between the Seminoles and the white people."

The negro by this time had so nearly completed his meal that he was able to take matters more leisurely. He replied:

"I 'se heerd sumfin ob dat, but I guess it aint so."

" You don't believe, then, Osceola will fight ? "

" No; he 's afeerd; he likes to make speeches to his warriors," added the African, probably recalling the scene of the morning, " but it am different when dar 's any fightin' to be done—Osceola aint dar."

Jack saw that his attempt to draw out Pete was a failure. He was lying straight along, was determined to give no information, and it was throwing away words to keep up the attempt.

Suddenly Jack sprang to his feet and caught up his gun. Husband and wife looked wonderingly at him.

" Gracious! " he exclaimed in well-feigned astonishment, " it is getting late; I have a long way to travel to-night and must be off; thank you again, Aunty, for your kindness; good-by, Pete."

He drew the door open with a rush, not waiting for a reply, and almost ran across the clearing towards the woods whose shadows he was anxious to reach. He chuckled to himself.

" I managed that pretty well. It would n't have done for me to stay any longer; Dinah had no suspicion of that interview Pete and I held this morning in camp, and he will take mighty good care that she does n't learn of it; if I had told her, I believe she would have banged him about until he was senseless. I 'm almost sorry that I did n't tell her,

for if ever there was a treacherous ruffian, he is one, and he deserves ten times more than he will ever receive.

"All the time he was eating, he was thinking of how to get the best of me. He did n't give any hint of what was in his mind, but I believe he was expecting some of the Seminoles or half-breeds. If they had n't shown up soon he would have made an excuse to leave, and brought them back like a hurricane. Then it would have been too late for even Dinah to help save me. There 's one thing certain, —I 've got a friend in that mountain of good-nature. Gracious! but she gave me a good cuff! My ear is still burning, but I could n't help laughing all the time; I would have been willing to receive a dozen of them in payment for that supper, which will last me until I get home,—provided," he added with a thrill of misgiving, "I reach there before to-morrow night; game does n't seem to be plenty, and Florida can furnish only one cook like Dinah Guinness."

Jack had decided while in the cabin that he would make his way to the bank of the river and keep to that, for he was tormented by the dread of going wrong and losing hours which it was probable he would never be able to make up. Now was the time when a boat was worth ten times what he could pay for it. Seated in that, the current would carry him straight homeward, and the St. John's was so

broad at that part that the starlight would not have revealed him to the keenest-eyed Seminole standing on either bank.

Despite the improbability of such a thing, Jack was hopeful of finding some sort of craft to take the place of the dugout and the scow that Pete Guinness had ruined. Where the Seminoles were continually passing to and fro, they must of necessity frequently cross the river, and many of them were owners of canoes, dugouts, and, in the case of the mixed-breeds and negroes, of scows. Moreover, it seemed likely that Pete himself had something of the kind, which it ought to be easy to find.

Jack had hardly entered the wood when he became aware that he was following a well-marked path which led to the river, probably two hundred yards distant. In keeping with the law that governed him from the first, he moved with extreme care, pausing at intervals to listen and look on all sides, so far as the faint light permitted. It was well he did so; for he had not yet reached the river-side when, in looking to the rear, he detected a shadowy form coming toward him from the direction of the clearing. It showed against the background of star-gleam, and was revealed because of the straightness of the path and the fact that the man was advancing at that moment over an elevation several feet in height.

Not for an instant did he doubt the identity of that phantom-like form. It was Pete Guinness making all haste to kill him.

“Dinah does not suspect his enmity to me; the fellow was cunning in persuading me to make no reference to it. Had she known, she would have punished him then and there, and never allowed him to leave the house until I was safe beyond his reach.”

Nothing was easier than for the youth to step aside from the path before the approach of his foe, whose faint footfall was heard the next moment. In the gloom Jack caught only a dim outline of the stocky figure, when it was revealed for a minute as it passed by near enough for him to touch with his outstretched hand.

“He will soon return,” was his thought, for both were close to the water’s edge.

He was not mistaken. Hardly ten minutes had passed, when he caught the footfalls of the negro, who used less caution now that he knew his intended prey had escaped him.

As if fate was playing into the hands of the lad, Pete stopped when no more than a couple of paces beyond in the direction of his own home. The miscreant was bitterly disappointed over his failure. He uttered an imprecation and added:

“He done got ’way from me dat time, but I ’ll

cotch him yit! Why did Dine take sich a shine to him? Lucky she did n't larn 'bout dat rumpus dis mornin' when Osceola knocked me fourteen summersets. Guess he did n't know nuffin 'bout dis path or he 'd tuk it; I 'll look out fur him to-morrer."

With this threat, the negro resumed his slouching walk to his cabin.

Jack Raymore stepped into the trail and waited for Pete to reach the rise where he first caught sight of him. He saw the flapping hat and the broad shoulders, with his gun resting upon one, as they were thrown in relief against the starlit sky beyond. Despite the gloom the target was fair.

"Now, Pete, it is *my* turn," muttered the lad, as he brought his gun to his shoulder.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE ST. JOHN'S.

BUT Jack Raymore did not fire. A slight pressure of the trigger was all that was necessary to rid the world of one of its worst miscreants, but the pressure was not exerted.

"Go," said the youth to himself, lowering his weapon and carefully letting down the flint; "you deserve death, but it would be wicked for me to take it, for it is not necessary to save my own life."

The next minute the man, who never dreamed of his peril, disappeared in the night, and then Jack, true to his waggish nature, added,—

"Dinah gave me a good supper, and it would be a poor return to rob her of her husband, worthless as he is."

Facing toward the river again, he moved silently along the path until he paused on the margin of the water. Everything was profoundly silent, and the gloom was such that he could not gain the most shadowy glimpse of the other shore.

"It must be that Pete has some sort of a boat around here," was the thought of Jack, as he began

groping along the shore, where in many places the vegetation overhung and touched the water. "This is his regular ferry, and I am quite sure he does n't make a practice of swimming across—hello! thank goodness!"

He had come upon the very thing he sought. At the base of the trail, a flatboat, much like his own, except that it was smaller and was unprovided with a sail, was moored by a rope attached to a big stone that lay on the bank. A strong pole, almost double the length of the craft itself, rested lengthwise on it.

"Reprisals are fair in war; he destroyed my scow and he owes me this one; at any rate I shall borrow it."

Without the slightest compunction, Jack lifted the stone and carefully deposited it in the bottom of the boat, stepping after it and picking up the pole, the end of which he pressed against the land, and shoved the scow far out on the smooth water, keeping up the effort until, as he glanced to the right and left, he failed to see either shore.

But another surprise awaited the youth. The scow as it seemed to him began moving up- instead of down-stream!

"What does that mean?" he asked, pausing in his work and overcome with amazement; "I never knew the tide to make such a difference as this at

so great a distance from the mouth; I 'm going back toward Dick's home—Well! "

The explanation suddenly broke upon him. The current, of course, was following its natural direction, but during the moving incidents of the day, Jack himself had become "turned round," as is often the case when one is threading his way through a trackless solitude, or awakes suddenly in a strange place.

" But for this, I should have tramped the whole night in the wrong direction, and, if no accident occurred, would have been back at Dick's house by sunrise. What a fine performance for one who pretends to know something of the woods! "

And yet when he came to reflect, it seemed impossible for him to commit so grotesque a blunder, inasmuch as he knew he was on the eastern side of the river, between it and the ocean, and consequently he could follow the right course only by keeping the stream on his left, whereas if he went wrong, it would of necessity be on the right. He surely must have discovered his mistake ere long, though another curious fact concerning those who go astray in the manner described is that they are unconvincibly positive of being right.

But the danger of such a misfortune was averted, and having reached the middle of the stream, he continued energetically plying the pole. He found

the St. John's so deep in that part that the whole length of the pole was required. He counted it a misfortune that he possessed no sail, for the surface of the water was crinkled by a breeze blowing in the right direction. He calculated that by depending wholly upon the current he would pass about three fourths of the necessary distance by daybreak. It will be understood, therefore, why he gave himself little rest during the first hour. Finally, when pretty tired, he drew the pole inside and sat down on the edge of the gunwale.

Had Jack felt any disposition to comfort himself with the belief that he had passed all grave peril, such feeling was dissipated by a sight that now broke upon his vision. On the western bank of the river and not far removed, a large structure was burning. It was hidden by the intervening forest, but the vivid glare that lit up the heavens, ascending almost to the zenith, proved that the conflagration was dangerously near. He drove the scow toward the eastern bank again, allowing it to drift without any propulsion from the pole, through fear that the slight noise might draw attention to himself.

Nothing was lacking to add to the impressiveness of the scene. He distinctly heard the reports of a dozen rifles, fired at irregular intervals, and the shouts that reached him were manifestly those of the merciless raiders who had probably caught some

pioneer and his family unprepared to beat them back.

"I suppose they belong to Osceola's band; I wonder that Pete is not with them, but he is probably on his way now, even though he has to swim the river to join the savages. I wonder whether Dick is a spectator. Osceola has had plenty of time to reach the place, for the progress I made to-day does n't amount to much."

Jack was disturbed by a rather curious discovery. The glow of the burning building, after being reflected against the sky, was partly reflected back upon the river, where a faint crimson showed over so extended a space that it threatened to reveal the boat and its occupant to any prowling Seminoles who might be looking in that direction.

His first inclination was to run the boat ashore and wait till the illumination subsided, but when he came close to land the overhanging bushes promised all the screen he needed. Forcing the craft under them, he allowed the pole to lie in the boat, while he aided himself forward, where the current was almost stagnant, by grasping the branches above his head and pulling upon them. His progress was slow and awkward, but he had the satisfaction of knowing it was real and would soon become unnecessary.

And gliding slowly and carefully along the bank,

securely hidden by the dense, overhanging undergrowth and dipping limbs, Jack Raymore unexpectedly became the witness of an incident unhappily too common throughout the Seminole war.

It was when opposite the space where the secondary reflection was most plainly marked, that he heard a splash. It was on the opposite side of the river and sounded as if some person had made a flying leap into the stream. It was immediately followed by one, two, three, four rifle-shots, accompanied by shouts and another splash, the meaning of which it was easy to guess. A white man, probably driven out of his burning home or some hiding-place, had fled with headlong speed and leaped into the water to escape his enemies at his heels. No doubt as he struck the water he made a long dive, and upon reappearing was fired at by his enemies who had pursued him to the river's margin. Whether hit or not could not be told, though the second splash indicated that he was not disabled, since, had he been, one of his pursuers would not have been likely to plunge after him.

The curious glow upon the river soon showed that this supposition was correct, for the head of a man was dimly discerned coming at a rapid rate towards the eastern bank, and headed for a point near Jack Raymore. Directly behind him appeared his pursuer, also swimming with tremendous power.

The meaning of this was so plain that Jack Raymond took up his gun and raised the hammer.

"I am not going to sit here and see that poor fellow killed; maybe the Seminole can't outswim the white man, but if he can, he 'll meet the bullet of my rifle before he overtakes him."

But an exasperating obstacle frustrated this good intention. When the pursuer was dimly seen, he was close to the fugitive, and in so direct a line with him that from the youth's position near the surface of the water he could not fire without endangering the one whom he wished to help. He rose to his feet and stood erect in the hope of securing the necessary advantage, but the faint glow on the river seemed to grow fainter at that moment and he could not make his aim certain. In his desperation he called:

"Head this way, friend, and I 'll shoot the devil that is after you!"

Whether the fugitive heard and understood or not could not be determined, but the next minute the necessity for such action as Jack called for was removed. The pursuer had caught up with the white man, and instantly the deadly struggle was on. The water was splashed into foam and suddenly both disappeared. When they came up, they were still at it, and while fighting with undiminished fierceness, they went below the surface a second time.

The interval they were out of sight seemed long enough to drown both, but suddenly a single head appeared, and the owner resumed swimming toward the eastern bank, but aimed for a point considerably below where the transfixed Jack Raymore was standing erect in his boat, rifle in hand, and peering through the leaves and vegetation.

The illumination had sunk still lower and his peering vision was unable to identify the swimmer. If he could make certain it was a Seminole, he was resolved to shoot him without a moment's hesitation, while if it was a white man, he meant to invite him to come to his boat. The doubt could not be solved, for whoever it was, he headed still farther up-stream, becoming more and more indistinct until he passed wholly from sight.

While the youth was standing motionless and distressed beyond measure by his inability to give aid to one who sorely needed it, a voice rang out from the wood above him, evidently directed to the Indians on the western bank. The first sound was a taunt accompanied by a forceful expression.

"You did n't get Eph Ashley that time! If you want that redskin that chased me into the water, you 'll hev to look in the bottom of the river, but I 've got his skulp with me—whoop! hurrah!"

It was not often that the Seminoles made such a mistake. Cruel fate seems always to favour the

merciless, but it failed to do so in this instance. Eph Ashley, as he announced himself, had purposely lagged in his swimming to allow the confident Indian to come up with him. What followed their meeting has already been made sufficiently clear.

The discovery of how the matter had terminated gave Jack Raymore a thrill of pleasure, and he sat down again to wait a while before resuming his voyage down the river. Although scarcely any reflection now showed on the water, he wisely decided to stay where he was until full darkness prevailed, and to refrain from pulling the craft alongshore by means of the overhanging bushes. The gain thus made was insignificant, and there was no saying what ears might interpret the meaning of the soft rustling.

That this was only simple prudence was proven in less time than the youth anticipated. Securely screened himself, he kept the bushes parted in front of his face and watched the gloomy river, tarrying for the last yellow glow to vanish before venturing from his hiding-place. His naturally keen vision seemed to grow stronger from exercise, and he had scarcely detected the faint sound of paddles, when he made out the form of a large canoe coming from the western to the eastern bank. It seemed to him to contain fully a dozen Indians, most of whom

were swaying paddles, for the craft glided through the gloom with astonishing swiftness.

Fortunately it was not headed for the spot where Jack Raymore was furtively watching, but seemingly was aiming for the point where Eph Ashley had emerged from the river and sent back his taunts.

"I don't think they have much chance of overtaking him," chuckled the youth; "he seems to be used to the woods and Seminoles, and is likely to make their venture cost them dear. It can't be he lived in the house they burned, for they would n't have given him a chance to run away, when all of the family must have been at their mercy."

In his excess of caution, Jack Raymore waited a full half-hour before stealthily pushing the craft from under the bank and resuming his journey down the river; and now that he has done so, it is fitting that we should leave him for a time and turn our attention to Dick Moreton, whose interests we have neglected too long.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE CANOE WITH OSCEOLA.

IT has been said that both Jack Kaymore and Dick Moreton underwent a change of views regarding the intentions of Osceola as to themselves, and it was because of such change that each was reconciled to their abrupt parting.

"Jack would not be safe in our company; Osceola is willing that his life shall be saved, and he therefore gives him a chance to reach home. Jack has had so much experience in the woods and knows so well what dangers threaten him all the way, that he surely will be able to take care of himself. How glad I am that he has been so fortunate!"

The mutual unselfishness was creditable to the cousins and intimate friends, but, as in the case of the absent one, the time speedily came when Dick Moreton was compelled to fix his whole attention upon his own interests. That the negro Steph had made known the enlistment of Captain Moreton was too clear to be doubted. Dick was equally certain that the knowledge had wrought a change in the feelings of the chief toward him. Were it

not so, he reasoned, he would have allowed him to go off in the company of his cousin. This logic led to the momentous question,—

“ What does Osceola intend to do with *me* ? ”

Surely no question could be graver, and it weighed upon the youth from the minute he saw his comrade disappear in the wood on his return homeward. Rejoiced as he was that Jack had been set free, he had no intention of submitting quietly to his own undoing at the hands of one to whom but a short time before he had done a favour that virtually saved his life; but it was because of the doubt that would obtrude itself that Dick Moreton hesitated.

The Seminole had lingered so long behind his war party that the two were entirely alone. The youth had his loaded rifle in his grasp, and was resolved that under no circumstances would he yield it to any one. He would fight to the last to escape doing so. Why, therefore, should he walk meekly and unresistingly with Osceola to his doom ?

His hesitation was not due to a lack of personal courage, but to the uncertainty that impressed him with increasing force. Osceola was walking in front, as is the Indian fashion, and he was at the rear, treading in his footsteps. If ever one person held “ the drop ” upon another, he held it upon the chief, whom he could shoot down before it was possible for him to whirl about and defend himself;

and, could Dick Moreton have convinced himself that Osceola intended to do him the unpardonable wrong he feared, he would not have hesitated, for it would have been unquestionably an act of self-defence.

But, as has been intimated, it was the ever-present doubt that stayed the action. Osceola was one of the most cunning of his race. Had he meant to slay his prisoner, would he thus place himself at his mercy? Would he allow him to retain his loaded weapon? Would he, in short, not have slain him before they were left together alone?

If Dick shot him down and fled, he could never know whether he had slain a true friend or one who had been changed from a friend to a relentless enemy, and the memory would haunt the youth all his life. Many a man would declare that the uncertainty itself as to the Seminole's intentions warranted the summary act on the part of the youth, but the latter could not bring himself thus to think.

It therefore naturally came about that Osceola walked forward, his keen sense of hearing telling him that his companion was at his heels. Both were silent, — Dick dispirited, apprehensive, and uneasy; the chief moody, grim, and resolute.

Their course led them a fourth of a mile before reaching the bank of the St. John's, below where the tributary which the cousins had followed emptied

into the main stream. On the shore the two paused and, looking across to the other bank, Ocoola emitted a whoop, three repeated, which was promptly answered from the opposite shore. Gazing in that direction, Dick saw a dozen of the band standing motionless, as if waiting for their leader. Near them were fully a score of dugouts and canoes, indicating that the company that had rushed so tumultuously from the camp had crossed the river and halted on the farther shore.

Plainly Ocoola was angered at something, for he called several times in his own tongue, his voice being harsh and impatient. The responses, however, were satisfactory and soothed his ruffled feelings, for, muttering to himself, he turned aside and began looking for something which he speedily found. It was a small but fine black canoe, so drawn up under the bushes that he did not see it until his moccasin almost struck its prow. His dusky face shone with so pleased an expression that Dick had no trouble in reading the meaning of the little incident. — Upon reaching the river and failing to find any boat, the chief was indignant, and called across for an explanation, which came in the form of the reply that his own canoe was there awaiting him.

"I thought they had forgotten me," he said to Dick: "it would have been bad for them if they had done so."

Standing beside his craft, the chief elevated his voice again and addressed a few words to the warriors on the other shore, which must have been a command to withdraw, for without reply all those who had been in sight disappeared.

"Step in," commanded Osceola, holding the delicately balanced craft so as to preserve its poise.

It was too late to draw back, and Dick carefully adjusted himself just beyond the centre, with his gun between his knees. Thereupon the Seminole gave the canoe a smart shove and leaped lightly into it as it was leaving the shore. He picked up the paddle with its broad end and handed it to the youth.

"Let me see if you know how to handle a canoe."

The appeal touched the pride of the lad, who had practised with the similar craft his father had owned for several years until it was stolen, and the son felt a natural pride in his skill.

"You must n't laugh at me, Osceola, if I am awkward."

"I will not laugh if you don't upset us," replied the chief with a grin, grasping each side of the structure as if to be prepared for the catastrophe.

Dick was obliged to let his gun go, for to use the implement effectively it was necessary to grasp it with both hands. It will be remembered, too, that the one who is paddling of necessity faces the point

for which he is heading, instead of the reverse as is the case in using the ordinary oar.

Osceola faced the young man, and watched his actions with amused interest. It was clear that he expected him to make a poor showing, with a probability of capsizing the boat, unless by quick effort the chief himself averted the mishap.

The reader will hardly thank us for saying that, to paddle a canoe properly, one must dip the broad blade first on one side of the boat and then on the other, for the regular change is necessary to hold a straight course. If the paddle is double, that is, if it has two broad ends, each is employed in turn, first one hand above and then the other, as the implement is changed from side to side.

If a single paddle is used, that is, with only one broad end, the relative position of the hands remains unchanged, the blade portion passing regularly from one side to the other.

Down went the paddle on the right, and the impulse was so powerful that the head and shoulders of Osceola bowed forward in response toward the youth. Before the canoe could swerve from its direct course, a similar impulse was given on the other side. This, as has been explained, held the course of the craft straight.

The paddling of such a craft is seemingly so simple that, in viewing the action, one finds it hard

to believe it in the least difficult, but it needs only a single trial to dissipate such belief. The person who enters one of those frail structures for the first time, is likely to have it shoot from beneath him with a drop as sudden as if he had stepped upon a bit of unseen and sloping ice. Then the paddle itself gives an eccentric action to the craft, with very little in the way of forward progress that is satisfactory.

Osceola made no attempt to repress his admiration of the skill of Dick Moreton. His black eyes sparkled and he smiled with pleasure.

"No Indian could do better; I did not dream you could do so well; there must be Seminole blood in your veins."

"Not a drop," replied Dick with a shake of his head; "why should not a white man do a thing as well as a red one?"

It was not a happy question, and Dick regretted it. He noticed the flush in the face of the chief, who made no response to the question. With a view of retrieving his mistake, the youth added,—

"My father once owned a canoe and I learned to paddle it, but I can never do it as well as you."

"You do as well now; if you grow tired, I will take your place."

"Would I do as well as Osceola, if I grew tired in paddling across the river?"

"No," he was forced to admit, and he did it graciously; "we could paddle many miles without becoming weary. This is better than a dugout or the boat that you and your friend used."

"Far better to one accustomed to it; does it belong to you?"

"It is mine."

As they approached the farther shore, Dick looked for the warriors that had responded to the calls of the chief. To his surprise, none of them was in sight. It appeared as if their leader had ordered them to continue their advance upon some point far removed, while he would follow at his leisure.

A discomforting thought to the lad was that he had already allowed a golden opportunity to slip by entering the canoe. With the broad river separating Osceola from his supporters, Dick could have made the resistance he intended with much more assurance of success than by waiting until on the same side with the war party. If Osceola resented his contemplated disobedience, it is probable that one or both of the rifles would be discharged. The other Seminoles could hardly fail to suspect the meaning and would rush to the spot. All the same, the youth was firmly resolved to force the issue within the next few minutes.

He had become convinced that the worst thing he

could do was to accompany the chief to a meeting with his lawless followers. Even if he held no intention of immediate harm to the lad, the latter could not hope long to escape a treacherous death at the hands of others. Steph was among the party poisoning the minds of those that were already poisoned, and he of all others would be sure to complete the deed that he came so near completing only a short time before.

A sudden resolution took form in the mind of Dick.

“ Osceola, I have shown you what I know about paddling a canoe, and you have been pleased to say a good word for my efforts. Now, let me see *you* sway the paddle, for you can teach me much.”

The compliment was so cleverly put that the chief could not refuse. Without a second's hesitation, he reached forward and took the implement from the hand of Dick, still smiling as he said,—

“ There is nothing I can teach you.”

Before taking the paddle, the Seminole perforce had to abandon his gun, which he had been holding loosely between his knees. In the most natural manner in the world, the boy took up his own weapon and held it similarly. Once more he had the war-chief at mortal disadvantage.

But how potent are trifles in the most critical moments! The last remark of Osceola, and above all

his winning manner, disarmed Dick Moreton for the moment as effectually as if he had dropped his weapon overboard. It seemed impossible that such a magnanimous Indian could cherish any ill-intent toward him. Surely he was a friend undeserving of distrust.

Thus it happened that Dick sat motionless with his weapon at command, watching the graceful manipulation of the paddle, and uttering compliments that were well deserved until suddenly the prow lightly grated on the shingle. Dick being at the front, the chief said:

“ Step out while I hold the canoe steady.”

“ Osceola,” replied the boy firmly, “ I go with you no farther!”

CHAPTER XXII.

A SAVAGE.

DICK MORETON spoke in a low voice, grasping his rifle firmly, prepared for the outburst that he was sure would follow his refusal to go any farther with the great Seminole.

But not the least singular of the many singular incidents of those twenty-four hours was the conduct of Osceola. It did not occur to the youth that the sagacious chief had read his mind from the first as if it were the page of a printed book. Osceola saw his doubt, his hesitation, his fears, his hopes, his resolves, and understood the cause. When, therefore, Dick looked up at his companion defiantly, the latter coolly swung the canoe sideways so as to bring it broadside to the shore, and stepped out. He left his rifle in the boat, high enough to the foot of the lad for him to touch it, and walking two or three paces up the gently sloping bank folded his arms and looked calmly at the astonished youth in the canoe.

The latter was mystified and did not know how to interpret the action of Osceola, upon whose face

there was the faintest trace of a smile. He still retained his knife at his girdle, and doubtless could leap upon Dick before the latter was able to catch up the gun the chief had left behind him, but not before he could raise and fire his own weapon.

"My friend thinks Osceola is his friend no more," said the Seminole, with his arms still folded, and his dark eyes fixed on the boy confronting him in the boat.

"I don't know what to think, Seminole," replied Dick, suiting his language to the slightly changed form of Osceola; "but if you are my friend, I cannot see why I should go with you into the camp of your warriors who are waiting for a chance to kill me."

"Why did n't you refuse when we were on the other side of the river?"

"I was in doubt; I doubt no longer."

"Doubt what no longer?"

"That it is right for me to stop here and turn back."

"My friend may go; Osceola will not say no."

This consent was so unexpected that Dick Moreton was nonplussed for the moment.

"Osceola, I believe you are my friend, and, therefore, I ask you to explain some things that I do not understand."

"Osceola is listening," replied the chief, still contemplating him with folded arms.

“ Why did you not let me go with my friend a little while ago, instead of keeping me with you until it is impossible for us to find each other ? ”

The chief made no answer to this question. He had a habit of often ignoring such direct appeals. While awaiting his answer, Dick did a thing that in its way was as diplomatic as the action of the Seminole a few minutes before. He laid down his rifle in the bottom of the canoe, rose to his feet, stepped out, and walked up in front of Osceola. Thus both were deprived for the time of their principal weapons.

When the youth saw the smile on the face of the chief, he could not help smiling in turn. The two now stood under a virtual flag of truce.

“ My son thought he held Osceola at his mercy,” said the Seminole, in his deliberate tones, and with something of the characteristic circumlocution of the race to which he always claimed to belong; “ he was right, when he walked behind me on the other side of the river, but not after we entered my canoe.”

“ Was it not so when you stepped out of the boat and left your gun behind ? ”

“ No; for my son would not harm his red father when he had no weapon.”

“ That is true; I could not do it.”

“ And had my son shot Osceola he would not have lived for a minute.”

“ Why not ? None of your warriors is in sight.”

“ Many of them are near; if I raised my hand they would rush to the spot, for more than one of them is watching us. They would come quickly, but not so quickly as the sound of your gun would bring them.”

Dick Moreton could not doubt the truth of this declaration. At the command of their chief, the warriors had not left but merely withdrawn for a slight distance where they could see everything that passed on the river shore. Consequently it was true that the only chance possessed by the youth was thrown away when he left the eastern bank. He was at that moment as powerless to escape as when in the centre of the Seminole camp.

“ Osceola, what did you intend to do with me ? ”

“ Adopt you, my son,” was the astounding answer.

“ That is another way of saying I was to be your prisoner; for I have a real father who has joined the soldiers that are fighting to defend their families against your people.”

The youth thought it better to anticipate the avowal that must have fallen from the lips of his companion within the next few minutes. He had learned the truth from the negro Steph, and his resentment, while as intense now as then, was under better control.

"Will not my son go with Osceola and help the Seminoles to fight for their homes that the pale-faces mean to take away from them?"

"How can you ask me to do that? But you have not told me why you parted me and my friend," persisted Dick.

"He is not the friend of Osceola; *you* are his friend."

These words cleared up the situation. The chief had allowed Jack Raymore to leave the Seminoles and try to reach his own home. He did not care what became of him and was certain he could never live to thread his way through the dangers that environed every rod of his course in the woods. He expected him to fall a victim to some of the Seminoles, but, out of consideration for the feelings of Dick Moreton, he was willing thus to arrange that his taking-off should not be witnessed by him. To add clearness to his words, Osceola said:

"Had my son gone with his friend, *both* would have been killed."

"And now you think it will be only one?"

The chief nodded his head.

"And you took me with you to save me, while you were willing to let him fall at the hand of some of your people in the wood?"

Again the dusky face slowly inclined forward.

It was on the tongue of Dick Moreton to utter a

passionate protest against this cruelty, but he had learned to be politic when conversing with an Indian, and especially with Osceola.

“ I do not know what has befallen my friend, but I pray he may succeed in reaching his home.”

The chief did not seem to think it necessary to reply to this. He remained motionless with his arms folded across his breast. Dick felt it wise to bring matters to a focus.

“ You have told me that I am free to go; then you do not expect me to join you in fighting against my own people ? ”

“ I do ! ”

Dick was startled. The contradiction of his own words was so direct on the part of the chief, that the lad feared he had changed his mind. If so, he was at the mercy of the Seminole, who knew how to be as merciless as death itself.

“ Would you ask me to fight against my own father ? ”

Once more the chief inclined his head. As he did so, his lips were sternly compressed, and the gleam of his eyes showed he was holding down with iron hand the tempest that was raging in his bosom. He added :

“ The pale-faces are robbers ! They are murderers ! The Great Father at Washington is the most evil of them all ! He lied to our chiefs ; he filled

them with fire-water; he gave them blankets and ponies and presents, so that they, too, would lie to their people, but you are the friend of Osceola and the Seminoles; you must help them to defend their wives and children; you must come with me; you shall not go away, for by and by you, too, will help to kill the Seminoles, that their women and children may starve."

Had Dick Moreton confessed the truth, he would have said that the chief had correctly divined his intention, but he was too wise to utter the words. Nor was anything to be gained by arguing the ugly question with Osceola, for the conviction that he had been unpardonably used was burned into his very soul. Nothing could eradicate it. To combat his views was only to enrage him still more. He must be handled with care in order to avert an open rupture which would dash forever the hope that had been roused by his words at the beginning of the conversation.

"Osceola, do you know why I went to my home, when I knew your people had taken the war-path?"

"To spy upon us and then go back and tell the pale-faces," was the angry reply of the chief, whose face was now darkened by a scowl.

"No; my good friend does me wrong."

"What was it that led you?"

Dick Moreton thrust his hand into the inner pocket of his coat and drew out something wrapped about with a handkerchief. Quietly unfolding the covering, he extracted the small portrait of his mother, dead and gone long before.

"I went back to get *that*, for it would have broken the heart of my father had it been lost."

As he spoke, he handed the miniature to Osceola, who with a slight hesitation took it, and, holding it in the palm of his hand a few inches from his face, scanned the exquisite work of art with absorbing interest. For a minute he did not seem to breathe, and he looked as if he would pierce the oval ivory through with the intensity of his gaze.

And then his expression softened. Holding the portrait in his right hand, he slightly raised his eyes, so as to look over the top of it into the face of Dick Moreton, who stood equally motionless, attentively watching him. The chief could not fail to observe the resemblance between the sweet countenance and that of the youth for whom he felt a special fondness. His glance changed several times from one to the other, and then never was a softer or more musical word uttered than the half-whisper that fell from the dusky lips,—

"*Mother?*"

Dick inclined his head.

"She shines again from your face. She is dead?"



" Yes; she left me when I was a small child; if I should go with you, Osceola, to battle and should meet my father and bring him low, what shall I say to my mother when I meet her in the white man's hunting-grounds, where the Great Spirit waits to welcome all good children ? "

For a minute Osceola continued gazing fixedly at the likeness. Then he reverently handed it back to the youth who again tenderly wrapped it in his handkerchief and restored it to his pocket. Something like a sigh escaped the chief, from whose countenance all traces of harshness had vanished, and he spoke in the same low, gentle, childlike voice:

" Return to your people; Osceola would not let you go with him if you wished. If you and I meet in battle, you may shoot me, but my arm shall never be raised against you."

" Nor shall mine ever be raised against you; it was my privilege to help you yesterday, and if I can turn aside the gun of the white man when it is pointed at you, I shall do so; you have my promise."

" It will be wise to wait till darkness before you set out, for the Seminoles are everywhere in the woods."

" I would prefer, Osceola, to go now, for I may be able to find my friend."

“ The path is full of briers and much I fear for you, but it shall be as you wish.”

“ I would like to go now,” insisted Dick, impatient because of his anxiety to rejoin Jack Raymore.

“ Take my canoe and go.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SKIRMISH IN THE WOODS.

DICK MORETON was too wise to hesitate even for a moment. Extending his hand, which was warmly clasped by the chief, he said :

“ Good-by, my friend ; God be with you.”

Osceola said something in reply, but, overcome for the instant by emotion, he so far forgot himself as to speak in his own tongue ; and, though the youth knew not the precise meaning of the words, he understood their import.

He was in the act of stepping into the canoe, when the chief came forward and smilingly lifted out his rifle.

“ My son will allow me *that*, and,” he added impressively, ‘ do not seek to go down the river by daylight ; the Seminoles are watching and will see you ; hide under the bank until night and then make all haste.”

“ The words of Osceola are wise and shall not be forgotten,” replied the youth, who thus avoided giving a promise which he did not intend to fulfil.

It was hard to repress his eagerness, and, shoving

off the canoe, he sprang into it, and caught up the paddle which was swung with more vigour than he had yet shown.

"He may change his mind and order me to come back," was the disturbing fear that kept the arms going like those of a windmill. Facing the eastern shore, Dick did not look around until in the middle of the river. Then, when he turned his head, neither Osceola nor any of his warriors were in sight.

"Safe for a time!" was the fervent exclamation of the lad, who never ceased his toil until the prow of the canoe glided under the overhanging bushes, near the spot where he had first entered the boat.

"I see none of them," he said to himself, scanning the farther shore, "but I have no doubt many of them, and probably Osceola himself, are watching me."

In this belief, however, the youth was mistaken. There was only one individual who was prowling on the opposite bank, with his evil eyes fixed upon the canoe and its occupant; that was Steph the negro, who was filled with consuming chagrin and rage at the sight of what he had witnessed.

Osceola had not lingered after the departure of the boat. Why should he do so, when he had decided upon his course and knew what his young friend intended to do? It cannot be conjectured

what his emotions were, as he turned about and plunged into the wood, but there is a chord in every breast, even though it be that of a savage, which responds to the touch of the good angel when it sweeps the strings. Dick Moreton had struck the chord when he handed the likeness of his dead mother to the fiery chieftain, who would have been a far better Indian had the white men shown justice to him and his people.

Osceola walked a short way in silence, his head bowed, and his abstraction so deep that he noted not whither his footsteps were leading, until he woke to the fact that he was in the midst of the tumultuous horde whom he had ordered to cross the river earlier in the morning. As he looked around and met the fierce countenances of Seminoles, negroes, and mixed-breeds, his old turbulent nature seized him with resistless grasp. His eye flashed, his bosom heaved, and his face was darkened by the terrifying scowl that shadowed it when he heard the name of General Wiley Thompson uttered, or when he recalled the wrongs of which he and his race were the victims.

"Are you ready?" he asked in his native tongue.

A thunderous affirmative and the wild brandishing of weapons were the response. No leader could have asked for a more eager following.

"Then follow Osceola!"

In a twinkling he was at their head, and the whole party started at a rapid walk through the pine woods. They were too numerous to adopt the Indian file, that is, a single procession, and became simply a straggling, ardent mob that would have awakened little misgiving among a body of Regulars where the plain was open, but they were to be dreaded when encountered in the forest, where they fought as did the redskins who decimated the ranks of Braddock's soldiers.

While at the head of the remarkable throng, Osceola was joined by two finely formed Seminoles. They were scouts who had been absent since the preceding morning and were returning to the camp of the night before, when they met the main body of hostiles. The chief had sent them out to gain information of a small body of cavalry that he had learned was on its way to join the garrison at Fort King. The scouts had done their duty well, and now made their report to the leader, who listened closely, asked many questions, and was satisfied with what they told him. They had seen the cavalry only a short distance away that same morning, plodding over the trail that led to the fort, apparently as serene and free from alarm as if no enemy were within a hundred miles.

But Osceola was not deceived by this statement. He knew the white soldiers employed scouts as skil-

ful as his own. In fact, he had met with a stirring personal experience of his own on the preceding day, when he came within a hair of losing his life. He could not believe that an armed body of men would attempt to ride through the pine barrens without using every precaution, but his hope of cutting off the whole party was not diminished; and, turning to his followers, he called upon them to hasten. As he spoke, he broke into a lope, which was instantly imitated by every one. The remarkable body of men looked more remarkable as they went on the double-quick among the trees, every one impatient to get within striking distance of the white soldiers.

Osceola had not paused to satisfy himself that every member of the party of the night before was with him. He took it for granted that such was the fact; but had he "called the roll" two would have failed to answer to their names. The negro, Pete Guinness, had fallen out of the ranks, and later in the day made his way to his own hut on the other side of the river, where a portion of his experience has been made known to the reader. Despite his seeming fierceness, he had no stomach for the impending battle and preferred to enjoy the cooking of his wife in their own home. The other absentee was Steph the negro.

One of the most striking features of the run of

the Seminoles through the pines was the slight noise they made. It would seem that the rushing against limbs, the clash of weapons, the occasional collisions, and the necessity of dodging and leaping aside would have been accompanied by a racket liable to bring disaster, but the whole body might have passed within a hundred yards of where a group of scouts were watching without betraying themselves.

Less than half an hour was occupied in the run, when at a signal from Osceola there was an instantaneous halt. While the men, only a few of whom showed by their hurried breathing that they had gone through any unusual exertion, stood motionless, looking in one another's faces and talking in guarded undertones, Osceola and the two scouts went a short distance farther to the well-marked trail that wound through the pines.

It took but a glance to tell them that the white soldiers had not yet passed that point. They could not be far off and would shortly appear. If they rode forward without any precaution, they must ride straight into one of the most complete ambuscades that ever brought about the destruction of a force of United States soldiers.

Osceola hardly needed to explain his plan, which was of the simplest character. It was for his warriors to lie down in the bush, wait until all the cavalry rode into plain view, and then fire together

as he gave the word. The distance was so short and his own men so numerous that he believed he could empty nearly every saddle at the first fire. But some of the soldiers would be only wounded, while poor markmanship or the concentration of several shots upon one white man was likely to leave a number unharmed. The chief's order therefore, was for his whole party to make a rush the moment they discharged their guns and finish the awful work with their knives or their clubbed weapons.

But while Osceola was making sure that this programme was understood, and as he was declaring that he would slay the man who fired before he gave the word, there was a crash of carbines from the wood behind them, and fully a score of mongrels went down and never got up again.

Captain Jordan had fought Indians before. As Osceola suspected, he had his scouts out, and it was Eph Ashley who gave warning of the approach of the Seminoles when they were but a short distance off. The cavalry instantly dismounted, and leaving their horses in charge of a small guard, ran silently in behind the hostiles and were upon them before they dreamed of danger.

"At 'em, boys!" called the captain, dashing forward; "don't let one of the devils get away!" His men were as enthusiastic as he, and charged with

an impetuosity that was resistless, despite their own inferiority of numbers.

The Seminoles gave many instances of thrilling bravery during their long fight with the United States, but in the present instance they were surprised. The fall of so many of their number, the shouts of the soldiers and the sight of them charging through the wood threw the hostiles into a panic and they scattered like a covey of quail.

Osceola was swept off his feet in the stampede, but, quick to read the meaning of it all, his soul flamed with fury at the sight of his men deserting him by wholesale. He thundered to them to stand their ground, and retreating only a few rods before he could extricate himself from the rush, he deliberately turned about, and raising his gun shot down one of the foremost soldiers. Then, instead of resuming his flight, he stepped behind a tree and began reloading his rifle.

His wonderful courage was almost as infectious as the panic. Two, three, ten, and then perhaps twenty of the Seminoles also leaped behind the nearest trees, and commenced firing at the white men as fast as they could reload and aim their pieces.

Seeing that a stand had been made, Captain Jordan called upon his soldiers to protect themselves as the Indians were doing, and a minute later a scorch-

ing skirmish was under way, after the manner in which all such conflicts should be fought,—that is, with an equal advantage to both parties.

It is on record that the most conspicuous courage in this fight was shown by Osceola, the leader of the Seminoles. When loading his rifle, he stood behind the trunk of a palmetto, barely large enough to screen his body, and then when ready he stepped boldly out into full view and fired at the first mark that offered. He brought down three soldiers and wounded two others. Several of the cavalry recognized him and called out his name to their comrades. Thus a concerted effort was made to wing him, and that he was not killed was one of the unexplainable features of the fight. Among the white men were many excellent marksmen who waited until the chief stepped from behind his tree to aim and shoot (which he kept up until the end) when they drew bead on him.

He was struck in the arm and a bullet nipped his ear, but in no case was he seriously wounded or so disabled as to prevent his keeping up his peculiar method of fighting. Had his warriors stood by him, he would have maintained his ground to the last, but the fire speedily became so hot and the white men pressed the hostiles so close that they were forced back. Osceola, who saw everything within his field of vision, soon realized that if he kept his

place he would be cut off and killed or made prisoner. When all hope of a successful resistance was gone, he delivered his last shot, whirled on his heel, and dashed into the woods with the speed of a deer. As he went, it was amid a storm of flying bullets which cut the branches over his head and barked the trees on the right and left, but he was not hit again and was soon beyond reach.

The dismounted cavalry that had been fighting so hard suddenly awoke to the fact that there was no enemy in front of them. The firing ceased almost as quickly as it began. They threw out guards, sent their scouts again into the woods, looked after their wounded, lifted them and their dead on their horses, and resumed their progress toward Fort King, where they arrived without further incident.

Savage, baffled, revengeful, and infuriated by the turn of events, Osceola brought his surviving warriors together at a safe distance, and, after ascertaining that nearly a third had been killed, formed his plans for striking another and more effective blow against the pale-faces, whom he hated with an intensity that can scarcely be imagined.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

DICK MORETON did a good deal of thinking while paddling across the river in the canoe belonging to Osceola. His first resolve was to lose no time in trying to rejoin Jack Raymore, from whom he parted earlier in the morning, but the difficulty impressed him as almost insurmountable. His cousin had started homeward overland, or through the woods. He would naturally use the course of the stream as a guide, but could have no possible suspicion that Dick was on the river in a boat trying to find him. Consequently, all the searching would have to be done by Dick.

Now, the warning words of the Seminole chief were not needed for the youth to understand the great danger that would attend the attempt on his part to paddle down-stream by daylight. It was far greater than in the woods, where there were abundant opportunities for hiding, and where one was not likely to be seen until an enemy was upon him. On the river, Dick would be in plain sight from both shores as well as from up- and down-

stream. If pursued by Indians, he was not expert enough in handling the paddle to leave any of them behind, while the width of the St. John's at that portion was such that he would be in fair range from either shore when in the middle of the stream.

And yet, if he forced himself to stay where he was until darkness, Jack would surely "get away" from him beyond recall. If he could only bring his cousin to him the problem would be solved, for all they had to do was to tarry until night and then make the best possible use of its shelter. As the simplest expedient, Dick emitted several whistles, which only needed to be heard by Jack to be recognized, but the fact that they were not answered was proof that they failed to reach the ears for which they were intended, and, much to his disappointment, Dick, after a number of trials, gave it up.

"If anybody heard me it was one of the Seminoles, so it may be well to make a change of base."

Keeping close under shore, he noiselessly paddled the canoe a couple of hundred yards down-stream, when he again ran under the overhanging bushes, where he could not be seen by any one unless he stumbled upon him.

Of one thing he was convinced: none of the prowling Seminoles knew of his whereabouts, unless it was some of Osceola's immediate followers on the other shore. It seemed improbable that any of

them had remained behind, but it might be so, and Dick spent a half-hour scanning the western bank, on the watch for the first indication of such a state of affairs. He could see the dugouts and other boats lying motionless against the bank, but there was no sign of life about them.

The youth was still peeping out when he heard the sudden sounds of rifle firing and shouts. Although the combatants were not far off, the sounds, coming through the woods and with the breeze blowing in the wrong direction, were faint and at times almost inaudible. Jack Raymore at that time was not far distant from his cousin, and it will be remembered that the oppressive silence in his case remained unbroken for hours.

"Osceola has attacked some white party," exclaimed Dick Moreton, excitedly, "and a hard fight is going on. Heaven save the poor fellows!"

He listened intently, and before long all noises ceased. The conflict was as brief as it was fierce.

Dick was warranted in believing that when Osceola left him and plunged into the woods on the other side, he took every one of his followers with him, and that as a consequence nothing was to be feared from that particular party. Furthermore, it was fair to think no others were loitering in the immediate neighbourhood, since they would have joined the warriors in the skirmish. Therefore, if these

premises were correct, the danger which threatened the young man must be at a considerable distance downstream, and it was safe for him to make use of the means placed at his command by Osceola.

Because of this reasoning, Dick pushed out from the overhanging vegetation and impelled the craft alongshore for several hundred yards, not pausing again until he had passed a sweeping bend in the river, when he repeated the action that has already been described, locating himself with so much care that he felt secure from discovery, even if a hundred Seminoles were prowling through the neighborhood.

It will be understood from what has been told that Dick Moreton was without the slightest misgiving of Osceola and his men, all of whom he was sure had accompanied him into the fight that had taken place deeper in the woods. He therefore gave no attention or thought to the collection of boats that marked the place where the warriors had made their landing. He scanned the river in front and along the eastern and western shores, on the alert to detect any peril from those points, while unfortunately he never once looked behind him.

Had he done so, using all proper precaution, he would have made an alarming discovery. A few minutes after his passing around the bend in the stream, one of the dugouts began stealing down the western bank, as if its single occupant were

anxious above all things to keep track, unobserved himself, of the youth who was making his way along the other shore. The man managed the task so well that he succeeded perfectly. He caught a glimpse of Osceola's canoe as it glided under the overhanging limbs, and he knew precisely where the halt was made.

"He doan' git 'way from me dis time," muttered the negro. "I got fooled yis'day and my shoulder am sore yit, but yo' doan' fool dis chile ag'in like dat."

Steph believed, from the peculiar conduct of the lad, that he did not intend to abandon the craft of the war-chief, for, if such was his intention, he would have left it immediately upon reaching land. His expectation was that the youth would soon emerge again and resume his stealthy progress by hugging the shore, but the minutes stretched into hours and he failed to appear. The ruffian was mystified.

There was good cause for the inaction of Dick Moreton. Reflection convinced him that the advice of Osceola was too wise to be disregarded. It would not do to continue down the river. He must remain in hiding until night and then make the most of his opportunity. It was a waste of time and effort to try to find Jack Raymore. The two must pursue separate routes homeward and trust to

Heaven and their own exertions to escape the manifold perils.

Such being the wise conclusion of Dick Moreton, he made another sensible resolution, which was to secure a few hours' sleep. He had lost so much rest the night before that, as in the case of his cousin, the slumber was welcome, and he had hardly disposed himself in the bottom of the boat when he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Meanwhile, the alert Steph, from his covert on the eastern shore, was peeping out and wondering what it all meant. Noon had come and gone and there were no signs of the youth whom he had selected for his victim.

"Dar's one ob two tings sartin," was the final conclusion of the wretch; "he hab luff his Osceola's kernoe or he am 'sleep, which bein' so, Ise gwine to look inter tings fur myself. I hopes he *am* sleepin'."

The negro drove the dugout from the screen on the western shore and paddled with a deliberate movement that enabled him to keep his boat advancing without any noise. He had had much experience in handling that sort of craft. Hardly for an instant did he remove his keen gaze from the point where he had seen the canoe glide from sight. It was impossible for him to mistake the spot, but his eyes remained glued to it as if afraid of doing so.

It has been shown that Dick Moreton, believing no danger threatened him from the rear, withdrew all attention from that part of his field of vision, whereas, had he not done so, he would have discovered the peril that threatened him.

Strange as it may seem, the African Steph committed precisely the same blunder. Had he glanced to the rear, he must have detected an insidious danger that was creeping down upon him. The mistake was the more remarkable in his case, for he had been a criminal for years, accustomed to hide in swamps, to look upon every one as his enemy, and to boast that no one had ever succeeded in getting the best of him.

Thus the situation assumed an extraordinary phase. Dick Moreton was sleeping quietly in his canoe, while a ruffian was stealing upon him like the jungle tiger approaching his prey, and behind this ruffian was coming a third boat, in which was also seated a single person, whose whole attention was centred upon the negro, who had but to turn his head to make a discovery that would have startled him almost into tumbling overboard.

"I don't know what ye 're up to," muttered the white man, "but it 's safe to bet it 's some deviltry, and I 'm going to act on that idee."

Remarkable as it was, barely a hundred feet separated the two, and the negro's attention re-

mained so absorbed in his dreadful task that he saw and knew nothing else. Fifty men might have paddled up behind him without attracting his attention.

Within a few rods of shore, the eyes of Steph took on a gleam of triumph. He had caught the outlines of Osceola's canoe, nestling under the dipping branches close to shore. And he saw, too, the form of Dick Moreton, still soundly sleeping,—rather, he saw his head, for the youth in disposing himself for slumber had stretched out along the bottom of the boat, with his shoulders following the conformation at one end, so that they were raised into plain sight.

The negro carefully laid down his paddle and picked up his gun from where it lay at his feet. The dull click of the hammer sounded, as he slowly brought it to a level and began sighting at the sleeping form of the boy. The next instant, the sharp report of a gun broke the stillness and the leaden messenger sped true to its mission.

But it was not the weapon of Steph that was fired. He had only time to touch the trigger with his finger, when with a gasp he made a lunge overboard, sinking like a stone, and that was the last of one whose crimes merited a much severer punishment.

The report of a gun so near him, and the fact that his sleep was about finished, awoke Dick More-

ton, who started up to a sitting position and stared in alarm about him. Through the interstices of the vegetation, he saw a dugout drifting down-stream without any occupant, while just behind it another dugout was paddled by the white man from whom he had helped save Osceola on the previous day.

"So it was you that he was after," coolly remarked Eph Ashley; "which the same looks as if I shot off my old gun about the right time."

"I don't understand it," said the bewildered Dick, staring around; "you are the only one I see."

"And if Eph Ashley had n't fired just as he did, you would n't be seeing him or anybody else; that darkey had you dead to rights."

A glimmering of the truth dawned upon the youth, who after a little more conversation learned the narrow escape he had had. Although the negro was invisible, having sunk to the bottom of the river, he knew who he was, and told Eph of his experience the day before with him. The revelation pleased the scout because it made his prompt interference the more meritorious.

"And now I want to know why you are hidin' under the bank in a canoe that aint the craft you had yesterday, but looks powerful like one that an Injin made?"

"It is an Indian canoe, for it belongs to Osceola himself."

" You don't say! Did he lend it to you ? "

" He did, of his own free will. "

And then Dick gave his whole story, to which Eph listened with rapt attention. His bronzed, seamy face was lit up with an expansive grin as he remarked :

" You and Osceola seem to be great friends. "

" We have been for years. "

" Then maybe you won't mind tellin' me what become of him yesterday when I run him to the edge of the river and he seemed to be snuffed out. "

Dick laughed.

" He was in the water alongside our boat all the time that you stood on the shore talking to us. "

And then the scout laughed.

" I knowed it, though it did n't come to me till I was too fur off to go back. "

" Do you blame me and my cousin ? "

" Not a bit. "

CHAPTER XXV.

LIVELY TIMES.

WHILE conversing, the scout drew up his boat alongside the canoe in which Dick Moreton sat. His training showed itself in the care with which he modulated his voice while speaking and in his constant glances around them. If Eph Ashley was ever caught unawares, it would be through no fault of his.

Having listened to the experience of the youth, he related his own. He was the scout that had detected the approach of Osceola and his band, and who by timely notice prevented Captain Jordan and his men from being cut off, and enabled them to administer a decisive repulse to the Seminoles.

“ I fired at that chief three times,” added Eph, compressing his lips and shaking his head; “ but I don’t understand it; something was the matter with my gun or with me, and it looked as if none of my bullets came within a mile and a half of him, though he was nipped by others.”

“ He is a brave man,” remarked Dick, his eye kindling; “ I know he is an enemy of my people, but I can’t help feeling a sympathy for him.”

" I don't feel a sympathy for *any* of his kind," replied the scout, echoing the sentiments of the majority of his race; " the best thing that could happen to Florida would be the killing of Osceola."

" A better thing that could happen would be a course of justice toward him and his people by our Government; but there 's no use of our arguing the question, Eph; I have two or three troubles of my own just now."

" What might they be ? "

" I 'm desperately hungry, am anxious to reach home, and would give anything in the world to see my cousin, Jack Raymore."

Eph screwed up one eye, as he had a habit of doing when solving some problem, and with a queer grin replied :

" I don't see any chance of fixing more 'n one of them troubles."

" What is that ? "

" There is no way of gettin' anything to eat, for though there 's plenty of game in the woods it 's too risky to hunt for it. That shot of mine will bring some of the varmints nosing 'round, and we must keep under kiver for a while. If you landed and looked for deer or some sort of bird, you would be picked off, sartin sure, for, though Osceola has plenty of scamps with him, there 's lots of others

sneakin' through the woods on both sides of the river. So *that* diffikilty is settled."

"It is if you call that a way of settling it," replied Dick with a rueful countenance.

"Likewise, which the same may be said of meetin' your friend. He does n't know you 're looking for him, but thinks you 're miles off with Osceola; he 'll steer clear of all likelihood of runnin' ag'in' you, and you 'll only make your danger ten times greater by tryin' to hunt him up."

"Therefore we 'll consider *that* settled."

"Which the same leaves your idee of gettin' out of this region and home ag'in. There ain't no reason why you should n't do it if you use common sense."

"Give a few particulars, please."

"Stay where you are, under this bank, till dark. Then paddle out into the middle of the river and keep it up till you're home, which orter be afore sunup, not forgettin' to use your eyes and ears for all they 're worth."

"Your plan is the true one, but it 's hard to wait here until night comes. What time of day is it?"

The scout parted the limbs which shut them in and looked out on the river and sky. A sweeping glance gave him the information he sought.

"It 'll be dark in about three hours, so the afternoon is half gone."

" And you will stay with me ? "

Eph shook his head.

" Can't do it; I'm out on a scout; we heerd of another party of Seminoles, farther down the western bank of the river, that must be looked after; I was on my way to do it, when the actions of this darkey told me it would pay to look after *him*; I must go back to t' other side and get to Fort King as soon as I kin after finding out how the land lays."

" You will run into imminent danger."

" Which the same is my bus'ness," replied the scout with another grin; " it's mighty little good I'd do if I did n't run inter danger. Ah, I have a plan, which will hit you 'bout right," he added, as a new thought struck him.

Dick Moreton listened eagerly.

" I'll paddle out on the river and make for t' other side, where just now my work has to be done. When I'm at a purty good distance, you can slide out from this place and foller, keepin' a close eye onto me. I'll be so much further downstream and so close to the western bank that I'll see anything that does n't look right. You'll stay near this side and watch me. Whenever I take off my cap and swing it round my head, it'll mean that you're to slip back under kiver and *stay there*; do you understand ? "

" Perfectly, and I promise to obey you."

"That bein' so, there 's no need of waitin'; I 'm off."

One sweep of his paddle sent the dugout from under the screen and made it skim over the smooth surface at a rate that drove the ripples skurrying right and left. Dick watched him, not forgetting to scrutinize everything visible in his field of vision. The dugout from which the negro Steph had made his last dive was several hundred yards away, drifting sideways with the current, but the scout himself was the only living person in sight, so far as he could discover.

"What risks he takes!" said the lad to himself. "After warning me in the most solemn manner against scores of dangers, he plunges right into them himself; but the difference is that it is necessary in his case and not in mine."

Following instructions, Dick waited until the diagonal course of the scout carried him within a hundred yards of the farther bank and he turned the head of his craft so as to keep it parallel with the river. That being the time fixed upon, the youth in turn glided into open water and resumed cautiously paddling the canoe down-stream, keenly alert for the first evidence of danger.

It will be understood that the scout, being much farther from the eastern bank, commanded a better view of it than Dick. His consummate woodcraft,

too, was likely to warn him of perils that would escape the eyes of the youth, whether they appeared on the right or left. It may be said the situation was the only possible one that justified Dick in renewing his descent of the stream.

Every-one knows how much action is preferable to inaction, and his spirits rose when he found himself making good progress in the right direction; but, true to his pledge, he kept sharp watch of his guide, ready to heed his warning the instant it was given him. He could see him plainly, his muscular arms moving with the regularity of machinery, maintaining the same distance from shore, but allowing nothing to escape his keen vision.

The progress continued in this manner for fully a mile, during which nothing was seen or heard to cause misgiving. Then a curious thing happened. Eph Ashley turned the prow of his dugout abruptly towards land, took several rapid strokes, and disappeared under the overhanging branches along-shore. While the act itself was not remarkable, the fact that he made no signal to the one who was following him with close attention, and who expected something in the nature of an order that might have been communicated by means of a gesture, was hard to understand.

"I don't think he even looked around at me," murmured the astonished Dick, after watching for

several minutes the spot where he had vanished. Then, wishing to justify his own course, he reasoned with himself:

“ I was not to run under the bank and stop until he swung his cap at me; he has n’t done that; consequently, I have the right to keep on until he makes such a signal. Here goes, anyway.”

And he resumed paddling, still keeping near the eastern shore, watchful and sharply alive to his critical situation.

Meanwhile, Eph Ashley attended to business. It was the truth that during his cautious descent of the stream, he had been unable to observe the first indication of danger, though well aware, as he declared, that the woods were full of Indians. He sympathized with the impatience of Dick and recognized the importance of his making as rapid progress homeward as he could.

“ Bein’ things be as they be,” was his conclusion, “ he may as well chance it, for if he stays where he is, he ’ll be in almost as much danger.”

Accordingly, when Eph deemed it was time for him to land and make the rest of his scout on foot, he purposely refrained from looking back or giving any signal to his young friend.

His own work was too important to be slighted. It was not a mere rumour, but the truth, that a second band of Seminoles were prowling along the western

bank of the St. John's, robbing, burning, and slaying wherever they found a chance. Warnings had been sent to the scattered settlers, most, if not all, of whom had hurried to the forts, towns, and protected points for safety. The belief was that Osceola intended to unite the two parties under his own leadership and make some important movement. The force in that case would be a formidable one, and it was important to ascertain if possible where he intended to strike.

Drawing the dugout up the bank where it was not likely to be carried away by the current, the scout plunged into the wood and called all his wonderful woodcraft into play. When a considerable distance from the stream, he changed his course so as to proceed parallel to it, and tramped for miles, gradually working back until he was almost at the shore again, though, as will be noted, he was a number of miles to the north.

Guided by that subtle sense which sometimes seems to be intuition in men of his class, Eph Ashley finally convinced himself that he was in the vicinity of the band of warriors for whom he was searching. One of the finest residences in the section was near, and he immediately became concerned to learn whether the inmates had heeded the warning which he himself had carried to them not to lose an hour in hurrying to the nearest fortified post.

It was necessary to use the utmost care, for when close to the main band, he quickly saw that they were on the alert, as if they apprehended something in the nature of what he was doing. They must have known by that time of the defeat of Osceola, and understood the cause. Night had set in when Eph reached the vicinity of the dwelling, which stood on a sloping lawn several hundred yards from the river, and was surrounded by a number of out-buildings.

Several days previously warning had been brought to Colonel Spanton, and the aged veteran had promised to lose no time in removing his family, leaving the live stock and the property to whatever fate might await them. On the edge of the clearing, the scout paused to study matters before completing his reconnoissance.

Within the same five minutes, a sheet of flame burst from the upper windows, and in less time than would seem possible the whole structure was ablaze. Eph at first was shocked by the belief that the family had been caught and would perish horribly, but with a relief unspeakable he was soon convinced that Colonel Spanton had kept his promise and with his loved ones was beyond danger. By the vivid glare of the conflagration, the scout saw fully twenty Seminoles running hither and thither, shooting down cattle, horses, and pigs, shouting and frolicking like

so many children let out for a holiday. The sight so angered him that, reckless for the moment, he stepped from behind the tree that had been sheltering him, sighted at a savage who had leaped upon the back of a terrified cow that was dashing wildly about, and tumbled him lifeless to the ground.

Fully half a dozen Seminoles had seen the white man, who the next moment was compelled to flee for his life. He had no time to reload his weapon, and it would have done him no good had the chance been given. He was as fleet of foot as a deer, and dashed through the woods at headlong speed, with his enemies so close upon his heels that he had no opportunity to dart aside or to hide, as he would have done could he have gained a greater start.

His only hope lay in flight, and Eph Ashley never ran faster, not checking himself in the least, despite the risk of breaking his neck, until he took a flying leap into the river, made a tremendous dive, and, pausing only long enough to catch his breath, went down again, all the time swimming toward the eastern shore.

His rifle was an encumbrance, but the scout was always prepared for such emergencies. A strong cord, looped between the guard of the trigger, and the woodwork beneath the barrel, was slipped over his head while he was beneath the surface, and with the weapon shoved behind him his arms were free.



EPH ASHLEY NEVER RAN FASTER.

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The good use he made of those arms, as the reader has learned, was witnessed by Jack Raymore from the spot where he was peeping out in the flatboat he had borrowed from Peter Guinness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOWN-STREAM.

HAVING interpreted the failure of Eph Ashley to signal to him as permission to continue his progress down-stream, Dick Moreton did so, following the course he had taken from the first. In other words, he held his canoe close to the eastern bank, swaying the Indian paddle slowly and with the utmost care, depending on his sight and hearing for notice of approaching danger.

All the time, he was hindered by a doubt of the prudence of his action. He did not need to be told that the only really safe course was to avail himself of the screen near at hand and to wait for night; but it was so much relief to know he was steadily progressing in the right direction that he kept on until the warning came. He caught the sound of a movement among the trees on his right which seemed to be made by a person running toward him. Afraid to approach the shore at that particular spot lest he should precipitate a meeting, he swiftly paddled slightly farther down-stream and then hastily drove the canoe against the bank.

At the moment of doing so, he heard the noise almost upon him, and, believing a collision inevitable, he dropped his paddle and caught up his gun. Just then a black wolf burst into sight hardly twenty feet distant. The two descried each other at the same instant, and it would be hard to say which was the more startled. The brute wheeled to flee, when, taking a quick aim, the youth sent a bullet just back of the fore legs, and the wolf leaping into the air with a yelp ~~fell~~ fell dead.

Had Dick Moreton but known that the animal was fleeing from Jack Raymore only a short distance away, how quickly the comrades would have come together!

But with neither dreaming of the truth, the short interval between them steadily grew greater. Jack, as will be remembered, believed the shot came from a Seminole and lost no time in getting as far from the spot as possible, while Dick, who had fired impulsively and without a thought of the consequences, instantly realized that he had done a most imprudent thing, and not doubting that the report would speedily bring one or more Seminoles to the spot, he did that which was a credit to his cleverness. He impelled the boat a full hundred yards farther down-stream and then once more turned the prow under the protecting branches along-shore.

Almost certain that one at least of his enemies would steal to the spot whence the shot had been fired, he thus hastily moved away, with a view of placing his enemy at fault when he came to make search.

Beyond a doubt this prompt and wise action saved the youth, for he waited less than a minute when he heard what was unmistakably an Indian picking his way among the undergrowth near the place where the wolf had fallen. The warrior was in such haste that he betrayed himself by the rustling bushes. He had come to the edge of the river, and, discovering nothing to explain the proceeding, began searching up- and down-stream.

Although there was risk of being heard in the profound stillness, Dick proceeded to reload his gun as quickly as possible. In the case of the old-fashioned flint-lock and muzzle-loader, it is impossible to do this without a certain noise, the ring of the ramrod as the wadding is driven home being often audible to a considerable distance. He satisfied himself with forcing the wadding down on the powder without hammering it, shoved the bullet after it, poured powder from his horn into the pan, pushed the ramrod back in place, and was then ready for whatever might come.

All this time he could hear his foe moving stealthily through the wood. At first, he passed up-stream,

until finally he could be heard no more, but the youth was convinced he was not rid of him.

“ Finding nothing in that direction, he will come back, and is certain to discover me if I stay where I am.”

Night was closing in, the gloom growing deeper each minute. Noiselessly pushing the canoe clear of the obstructing vegetation, he allowed it to drift with the sluggish current, and once again skilfully avoided a grave peril; for the Indian did make his way to the spot where the youth had been hiding, only to fail to discover him. He groped for a few yards farther and then gave up the search.

What would have been the result of his detection of the lad, it is impossible to say. Since Dick was on the alert and able to note every movement of his enemy, it is quite probable it would have been bad for that enemy, who seemed to be alone. Had it turned out, however, that he had friends near, it is equally probable that a collision would have been bad for the young man. Consequently, considering every view, it was perhaps fortunate that the meeting did not take place.

Night had closed in, and, remembering the injunction of Eph Ashley, Dick now boldly turned the prow of his canoe outward and paddled to the middle of the river, his intention being to keep it up, if permitted, to the end of his voyage.

However, it was not so to be. He had gone less than half a mile when he was alarmed by sounds on the western bank that he was sure were made by Indians. It was so early in the evening that the shore was dimly visible, and he immediately headed again to the right and once more availed himself of the protection of the overhanging limbs.

"I have been in too great haste," was his thought; "if they let me alone, I shall wait a good while. There are plenty of hours before sunrise to allow me to get out of all danger. I wonder that everything has gone as well as it has."

Dick was so impressed by the recent occurrences that it may be said he became morbidly cautious. He waited under the bank much longer than was necessary, and when finally he ventured forth, the gloom was no deeper than an hour previous. He had come to the belief that, despite what Eph Ashley said, it was safer to remain near one shore than in the middle of the river. He therefore impelled the boat just far enough outward to allow it to keep clear of the overhanging limbs, and resumed his stealthy paddling of the craft.

Soon afterward he saw the crimson glare in the sky to the left, where the building of Colonel Spanton was ablaze. He observed the reflection on the river and, still sensitive to the fear that had been growing upon him, stopped short, determined to

keep at a goodly distance until the light had wholly faded from the sky.

Fully understanding what it meant, he was too far removed to witness the desperate scrimmage which the scout had with one of the pursuing Seminoles in the river, but the taunt that he sent back after emerging from the water, was uttered in so loud a voice, that he understood each word.

“ By gracious, that ’s Eph!” exclaimed Dick, “ and he ’s on this side of the river. He must have been in a pretty tight box, but he seems to have gotten himself out. I will be on the watch for him, if he comes this way.”

When, therefore, some time later, he heard a footfall that was evidently made by a single person, he did not hesitate to pronounce the name of his friend, in so guarded a tone that it could not have been heard beyond him. Instantly the footfalls ceased, as if the person had caught the voice and was listening. It was a risky thing to do, but Dick called:

“ Helloa, Eph! It is I—Dick Moreton!”

“ Well, I ’ll be hanged!” exclaimed the scout in what sounded a recklessly loud voice, as he changed his course so as to appear a minute later at the side of the canoe; “ how comes it you are here?”

“ Why should n’t I be, when I am on my way home and was waiting for that light to go down, and heard your voice.”

" I did speak rayther loud, did n't I ? " chuckled Eph; " but I fooled 'em so nice, I could n't help it. You heerd what I said ? "

" Yes, and probably should if I had been a mile farther off. Tell me how it all happened. "

Thereupon, the scout gave the particulars of his experience after parting company with his young friend during the afternoon, and made clear why he had not signalled to him when he ran his dug-out to the western shore.

" I thought it best to wait here until there was n't any light on the river; for I never knew the Seminoles to be so plentiful. "

" It 's the second band of Osceola, and they 're on both sides of the river; you 've been mighty lucky, younker, to git as far as you have. "

" I have indeed; do you think it is safe for us to go ahead ? "

Eph parted the bushes and peeped out.

" There 's no light on the river worth caring for, but I 've an idee that them complimentary words I said will bring some of the varmints lookin' fur me — *Sh!* "

He drew back his head and whispered to Dick not to move or breathe. The lad obeyed the first part of the command, but he could hardly be expected to heed the second.

The next minute the large canoe with its dozen

warriors swept past within twenty feet of Osceola's craft, and its two occupants who, safely hidden in the darkness, caught a glimpse of the shadowy outlines which vanished in the same moment that they appeared. The almost inaudible ripple of the Seminole's paddles was heard, but not one of the occupants spoke. When they were beyond hearing, Eph chuckled:

"How them varmints think they 're goin' to catch me is more 'n I can understand; if you were n't with me, younker, I 'd have some tall fun."

"How?"

"I 'd send a bullet right among 'em that would make 'em dance; then I 'd observe a few more observations, as I took a dive into the woods and p'raps could draw 'em apart so as to give me a chance for a little more fun, but," he added with a sigh, "there ain't no use of thinkin' of that. Younker, s'pose I try the paddle."

"Nothing would suit me better," replied Dick, passing the implement over to his companion, who it need not be said was a master of the art of navigating a canoe. The youth thought it prudent to tarry a while longer, but he did not oppose the expressed intention of his companion to press on without intermission.

"I can't go all the way home with you," said

Eph; "fur I 'm needed in these parts, but I 'll keep you company for a few miles."

Vastly to his relief, Dick saw that not the slightest reflection of the fire rested on the river, and only a faint crimson glow showed in the sky over the charred ruins of Colonel Spanton's home. The youth often glanced to the rear, dreading the appearance of the large canoe and its many occupants, but his companion seemed to have dismissed it from his mind, for not once did he look behind him.

Hardly a fourth of a mile below the scene of his late encounter with the Seminole, Eph suddenly ceased paddling, though Dick could not hear or see anything to explain why he did so.

"You 're nearer the front than me," whispered the scout; "lower your head and tell me whether you can see anything in front and in the middle of the river."

Dick did as requested and after a minute's keen scrutiny replied in an undertone,—

"I think there is a boat going the same way with us."

"I was sure of it."

"Let 's run into shore!" whispered Dick, excitedly.

"Not jest yet; we 'll first find out how many of the varmints there are."

Plying the paddle with great vigour, he sent the

beautiful boat fairly skimming through the water, heading straight for the craft in front. The youth took up his gun and raised the hammer that he might be ready for any emergency.

"Don't forgit that we ain't out of the woods yit," said Eph warningly; "and there be plenty of the varmints on both shores. I 'll look out for 'em, and all you 've got to do is not to yell too loud or split your sides laughin'."

Thus admonished, the chums sat down in the bottom of the canoe, and first of all Dick Moreton told his whole experience from the time they parted early that morning, one to go off with Osceola, while the other started on his lonely homeward tramp through the woods. Strange indeed was the coincidence that had brought them so unexpectedly together, when both believed they were separated by miles.

Then Jack undertook to relate all he had passed through, and his story was as interesting as the other. At its conclusion, Dick asked:

"What did you say took place when you were in the cabin of Dinah, the coloured woman?"

"Nothing special, except that she gave me the finest meal I ever ate."

Dick uttered the most mournful groan that can be imagined.

"Please don't mention that again; I have n't had a mouthful since morning, and you know it was mighty little I ate then. Let us try to forget it."

"Forget it!" exclaimed the waggish Jack; "I

He was toiling with care and vigour, hopeful and buoyant, when to his consternation, he observed an Indian canoe emerge from the gloom behind and approach so fast that he saw at once it was useless to try to escape or reach either shore. He therefore dropped the pole and caught up his rifle, prepared to defend himself to the last.

While standing thus at bay, he was startled by a low laugh.

“ Jack, I would n’t shoot off that gun, for you might hit somebody.”

The weapon fell from the hand of the youth, who exclaimed:

“ My gracious! is that you, Dick ? ”

“ I have a suspicion it is,” replied the happy cousin, who had recognized him first, “ and this is our friend Eph Ashley who is swinging the paddle.”

The scout did not speak until with a graceful sweep he brought the canoe alongside the more cumbersome craft.

“ I reckon, younker, you might better ship with us; we ’ve ’nough room and we can travel faster than in that lumber wagon.”

Jack stepped carefully into the canoe and caught the hand of his delighted cousin, who was overjoyed at the unexpected meeting. For some minutes they talked so fast and so much together that neither could understand the other.

"Don't forgit that we ain't out of the woods yit," said Eph warningly; "and there be plenty of the varmints on both shores. I'll look out for 'em, and all you 've got to do is not to yell too loud or split your sides laughin'."

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"Please don't mention that again; I have n't had a mouthful since morning, and you know it was mighty little I ate then. Let us try to forget it."

"Forget it!" exclaimed the waggish Jack; "I

can never forget that luscious pone, the chicken browned and tender as milk toast, that coffee like the nectar of the gods, the golden butter, the mealy potatoes, sweet and Irish,—can you expect me to forget *them* ? ”

“ If you say another word,” groaned Dick again, “ I ’ll jump over the side of this canoe and won’t so much as say good-by to you.”

“ Very well, let ’s drop it; I know if I was as hungry as you I would think it low down for anyone to talk to me about fragrant coffee, browned chicken, spongy pone, and fresh butter, because—hold on ! ”

Dick in his desperation had made a feint of climbing over the side, when his cousin in pretended alarm seized his arm.

“ Did n’t I tell you I would n’t say anything about that juicy second joint of the chicken you ’re so fond of, the mealy sweet potatoes, the luscious pone, and the coffee that would make your hair curl more than it does now ? I should think, when you once heard my promise, it would be enough,” added Jack, in well-simulated indignation.

“ Eph, do you know where the cabin of Pete Guinness is ? ”

“ As well as I know where you be this minute; I ’ve had a meal or two there myself when things wer’ n’t as squally as they be now. All that Jack

says about that coffee and pone and browned chicken and rich butter ain't half as good as it is—— ”

“ Oh, you too! How far is it to Pete's home ? ”

“ Just a little way; we could get there in a few minutes,” replied the scout, glancing over his shoulder as if he expected to see the log cabin perched on top of the scow that was being rapidly left behind.

“ Won't you go back so I can start a famine in that humble home ? ”

“ No, sir! We go straight ahead as long as the varmints leave the way open for us, which the same they ain't likely to do very long.”

When the merriment had subsided, Eph and Jack expressed their sympathy for Dick, and the scout offered to return to the cabin of the negro; but learning that it was several miles distant, Dick would not listen to anything of the kind.

“ I can stand it until to-morrow, and when I once get home I'll make up for all this, so be good enough to say no more about it. Do you think there is a fair chance of our getting through without any more trouble with the Seminoles ? ”

“ No; there ain't much more than a dozen miles left, but I think you'll find the varmints thicker along that distance than you did behind you.”

“ Why should that be ? ”

“ Osceola is bringing his bands together to make

an attack on some point, none as yet knows where. I s'pect he has his eye on your town; leastways he 'll have lots of his men hangin' round till he finds out what the chances are, so there 's plenty of 'em all the way down stream."

" You 'll go the whole distance with us ? " was the inquiring remark of Jack.

" I can't promise that, as I told the younker a little while ago; the Gin'ral has give me strict orders to keep track of Osceola; I 've had him under my eye purty well for the last few days, and if it had n't been for you younkers yesterday I 'd have wiped him off the face of the earth. But that 's all right, and I 've no fault to find; I let him slip away this afternoon while I give my 'tention to the colored gentleman I 've heerd you speak of as Steph."

" And fortunate it was for me you did so ! " was the fervent response of Dick Moreton ; " but, from what you have just said, Osceola may be in the neighbourhood of Jack's home, where you will have to look for him."

" It 's just 'cause I don't know 'zactly where to look for him that I must begin up the river where I dropped his trail."

" Was he with that party that burned the home of Colonel Spanton ? "

" I s'pected to find him among 'em, but did n't.

If he had been there I 'd have seen him, but he was n't."

"Perhaps because he has already gone down the river," suggested Jack, who naturally was anxious to retain the company of the scout.

"And p'r'aps 'cause he 'd gone *up* the river," replied Eph. "It would please me powerful well, younkers, to stay by you, but you can see it won't do."

"Pardon us for arguing with you," said Dick; "you have been so good a friend that we feel no fear when you are with us. But you have your duty to do, and it is wrong for us to try to draw you aside."

"It ain't so wrong," chuckled Eph, "as it is foolish, fur you can't do it. I 'll stay by you for a mile or so more and then leave you to paddle your own canoe, or, rayther, Osceola's. Both of you understand the bus'ness better than any younkers I know of your age, and you orter have larned 'nough from what you have been through to know how to keep out of danger. If nothin' happens to stop you, you 've plenty of time to git home while darkness lasts, though there 'll be a moon before midnight."

"Then we shall have that disadvantage for a part of the way."

"There 's no mistake about it."

"What time is it now?"

The scout looked up at the sky on the right and left and to the front and rear. How that enabled him to acquire any knowledge of the hour it is impossible to conjecture, but he spoke with the positiveness of certainty:

"It lacks a little less than three hours of midnight, and the moon will show itself in an hour."

"We ought to be a long way nearer home from the rate at which we are going."

"But you won't keep up this gait much longer, for I won't be with you, but I know that one of you youngers can handle the paddle almost as well as me."

"Jack is every whit as good as I," Dick Moreton hastened to say.

"Not by any means," protested the cousin, "but I am able to take my turn; it's a good deal better than poleing. I wonder what's become of Pete's boat?" he added, looking back in the gloom.

"Left out of sight long ago," remarked Eph; "gone to keep company with the dugout of Steph."

"It does n't seem to me," observed Dick, "that if there are any Seminoles on either bank they will be able to see us, for the river is broad and grows broader as we go down-stream."

"I think so myself, but at such a time as this the varmints depend on their hearin' more 'n their

seein', though they have powerful sharp eyes. When I leave you, you must n't do any talkin' onless in a whisper, and then only when you have to speak, which won't be often, which the same bein' as it is, it's a good time now to shet up, 'cause you obsarve the sign ahead."

Eph spoke coolly, but the boys saw the cause of his words while they were yet in his mouth. A little way downstream, on the right bank, suddenly flashed out a point of light like a star. It was too small to show any reflection on the water, but there could be no doubt that it was caused by some of their enemies.

Dick and Jack expected the scout to turn the canoe toward the left bank, but he kept it in the middle of the channel and swayed the paddle slower in order that he might make their progress perfectly noiseless.

All conversation ceased and every eye was fixed upon the gleaming point of fire, that might mean nothing or a great deal. Why it should appear so small and star-like was a puzzle to the lads, for, if it marked a camp, it would seem that it should have grown in size as they drew near it.

"It's gone," suddenly whispered Jack.

"Only for a minute," replied Eph; "it'll show ag'in."

Sure enough, it shone out clear and bright when

they had progressed a few rods farther, proving that some obtruding vegetation had obscured it for the moment. The boys were perplexed ; seeing which, the scout explained in a guarded voice,—

“ A few of the varmints have started a fire a little way back from the water ; if it was nearer it would show bigger.”

“ Had n’t you better paddle closer to the other side ? ” asked Dick.

“ Just as likely as not a lot of the varmints are there ; so long as I keep in the middle they won’t notice us, unless some of them happen to leave one of the banks purty soon.”

It was further evident that the Seminoles had no suspicion of white persons being on the river at that time of the night, for, had they imagined anything of the kind, the fire would not have been kindled, when it must serve as a beacon of warning.

The hearts of the boys beat faster as they came opposite the danger-point, but there was no perceptible change in the manner and action of the scout, who soon took them past, and a half-mile downstream ran in to shore.

“ Here I leave you, younkers,” he said, passing the paddle to Dick, and stepping out on the land ; “ keep in the middle of the stream, as long as you can, and don’t forgit yourself fur a minute. I’ve got one more thing to say, younkers,—this war with

the Seminoles is goin' to be a long one; you 're big 'nough to 'list, and the best thing you can do is to do it as soon as you can, for you 'll be needed. Good-by."

He wrung the hand of each in turn, received their thanks and good wishes, and disappeared without another word.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WORD OF A KING.

THE boys could not forget the wise counsel of the scout, for they knew none so well qualified to advise them as he. Glad would they have been to have his company all the way, but they appreciated the sense of duty which forbade.

“It is easy to paddle this canoe,” remarked Dick, in a guarded voice, “and I will do so for some miles to come. Place yourself as far forward as you can, Jack, and keep a bright look-out for danger. We will not speak until there is need of it.”

“All right,” responded his cousin, who shifted his position as requested, thereby gaining the best place for making use of his alert vision.

Inasmuch as most of the night was still before them, though the moon promised to add to their peril, Dick Moreton swung the paddle with less power than at first, the reason for which was his anxiety to avoid making any noise. The risk would have been greater had he put forth more exertion, and but for the coming of the moon they would have felt comparatively free from alarm; for the St.

John's had now become so wide that there was little likelihood of being seen from either shore previous to the appearance of the orb. For a long time all went well, and then a turn came that filled both with dismay. The river made a long sweeping bend, when its course assumed an almost mathematically straight line for several miles. At the very time the canoe passed round the curve of the stream, the edge of the full moon appeared directly ahead, as if it were rising from the bed of the river itself.

Every one knows how rapidly the orb seems to ascend when on the horizon, and the boys could see it climb above the distant tree-tops until the great round ball stood forth in the unclouded sky. The sight was beautiful, but they would have been more than glad to dispense with it, for the path of light that streamed from a point miles in advance to their boat caused it to stand out in such bold relief that it was a conspicuous object from either shore.

Had the moon appeared on the right or left the situation would not have been so alarming, but it was as if an immense bonfire had been kindled on the shore, bathing them in an overwhelming wealth of illumination.

Jack Raymore turned his head and whispered excitedly,—

“ Dick, this won't do ; we are sure to be seen.”

“ It looks so ; shall I run to shore ? We can't be

more than six miles from home, and it is easy to walk that far."

"Yes; do that, and don't lose any time about it."

"No use, Jack; we 're too late!"

The cause of this despairing exclamation was the appearance of a large canoe, which shot like an arrow from the western bank and headed for the other side, its course being such that if unchanged it must pass slightly in advance of the boat containing the boys.

It had hardly appeared when a second and third followed, and Jack, whose face was turned while looking back at his companion, descried still another, coming from the eastern bank. In the last was seated one Indian, while the others were crowded.

The explanation was clear. A large war party of Seminoles were crossing the St. John's from the western shore to the eastern. The last boat had landed its passengers and was going back for more.

A cruel fate had led the boys, after their safe passage through many perils, to precipitate themselves into the very heart of this frightful danger.

Dick Moreton spoke the self-evident truth when he declared that they were inextricably caught. Whichever way they turned, they were sure to encounter enemies beyond their power to count. All were on the war-path, and had they chosen they

could have riddled the youths, as they sat motionless, Dick having ceased paddling, gazing helplessly about them. Flight was out of the question, for every boat could quickly overtake them, and, since the Seminoles were on both hands, it was impossible to gain the protecting screen of either shore.

"It's rough," said Jack, "and the only thing we can do is to surrender, something which you know Eph said a white man is a fool to do to an Indian."

During the few moments following the terrifying discovery, the Seminoles were not idle. The curious coincidence that caused them to begin crossing the river at the very time the boys were paddling by enabled them to see the couple first. Consequently when they glided out from the shore, there was not a particle of doubt that they "had them." Instead, therefore, of hastening, they leisurely surrounded their prisoners, who made no effort to escape by flight nor did they offer any resistance.

The reader has already suspected the one hope that was in the hearts of Dick Moreton and Jack Raymore.

Was Osceola with this party? If so, it might be he would still show friendship toward at least one of them. If he were not present, their situation would be all the more hopeless because of the previous kindness of the chief to the boys. To avert

any more interference by him, these Seminoles would make haste to place them beyond his ability to do so.

It will be understood, therefore, that Dick and Jack scanned the dusky faces as they closed around them as well as they could in the moonlight, praying that among them might be seen the countenance of Osceola, but, sad to say, they failed to discover him.

They recalled what Eph Ashley had told them about a concentration of the hostiles in that neighbourhood, with a probability that they were planning an attack on the little town in which Jack Raymore made his home. What the boys saw seemed to confirm the scout's surmise, but the same condition of things warranted the expectation that the war chief would lead them.

Had Eph Ashley vigorously followed up his purpose, he could not be far off; but, for all the help he could give his young friends at this time, he might as well have been at the North Pole.

There was considerable talking among the Seminoles and mixed-breeds who inclosed the prisoners in the midst of them. Many were members of the party with whom Dick and Jack had spent the previous night. It followed that they were recognized, those who had not previously met them having matters explained by those who had.

Suddenly from out the babel a voice addressed the boys.

“Dat Osceola canoe; where get him?”

The question was asked by a full-blooded Seminole, sitting in the front of the largest boat, and evidently the leader. The boys instantly looked at the speaker, and his painted countenance as revealed in the moonlight was the opposite of reassuring.

“The great chief gave it to us that we might go to our home,” replied Dick, showing no timidity, but at pains to avoid anything in the nature of defiance.

“Big lie!” called out the other; “stole canoe!”

“Ask Osceola,” calmly replied the youth; “if he says we lie, then do with us what you please.”

“Osceola not here—he gone long way—won’t see him for a moon.”

Had the cousins believed this they would have been in despair. It might be true, but they did not think so. Their only hope lay in gaining all the time they could, with the possibility that the chief would appear, for it will be admitted that the youths never needed him more sorely than then.

“Send word to him, that you may know we speak with a single tongue.”

The coolness of this proposition caused a smile among the stoics, who, as is well known, are not

given to that sort of thing. The Seminoles who understood enough of English to catch the meaning of the words, interpreted them for their companions. It was only to be expected that all would be amused.

"We kill you now—we not wait," said the spokesman of the party rapidly working himself into a passion; "we kill all white dogs—kill all white men and squaws in Flordy—kill you!—kill you!"

"If it comes to that," interposed Jack Raymore, picking up his rifle, "we may as well go down with colours flying, Dick; leave that fellow to me and you pick out any one you choose—helloa! something is up! By George!" whispered the lad; "look behind you, Dick!"

There was good cause for the flurry of Jack Raymore, for, while the Seminole was uttering his threats, he had seen still another canoe approaching the group. It came from a point a little farther upstream and contained two Seminoles. One was paddling with might and main, while his companion was seated with folded arms just behind him, and faced the group, which he seemed anxious to reach.

With no special interest Jack Raymore looked at the two, when he suddenly recognized the one seated near the stern with his face turned toward them

and the full rays of the moonlight falling upon his features.

He was Osceola himself, and when the boys realized the fact they were ready to jump overboard with joy.

Jack laid down his rifle again and calmly waited. Dick retained his paddle, his heart a-flutter with renewed hope.

When the chief joined the group, it was evident he was displeased; but he was not in the towering anger that caused him to smite Pete Guinness to the earth. Neither was his displeasure against his own warriors, for they had done nothing to which he could object. It was their duty to stop a boat containing two white persons, even though they knew Osceola himself had befriended them. In fact, had his followers slain them, while he might have regretted it in the case of Dick Moreton, it is unlikely that he would have punished any one for it.

That which irritated him was the carelessness of his young friends in running into the danger that brought their discomfiture. He had given them a fair start homeward and they ought to have reached their destination without the need of his helping with any more favours; but here they were,—right in the midst of his fierce mongrels,—and the chief had to decide what was to be done with them.



Another important factor in the case must be noted. The presence of Osceola and this large party, and the fact that they were engaged in crossing from the western to the eastern bank, left no doubt that the leader intended to attack the village where Jack Raymore made his home. If the boys were set free and allowed to go thither, the first news they would tell would be of the presence of the powerful war party within a few miles of the place. Thus warned of what was coming, the settlers would put themselves in the best possible condition for defence (for many of the warriors without whom Osceola would not risk defeat were still a considerable distance off and could not arrive for an hour or two), with the probabilities pointing to another defeat of the Seminoles.

To release the boys, therefore, was virtually to give up this part of the campaign, and yet the Seminole leader did it without hesitation.

Turning to Dick Moreton he said:

“ Osceola is not pleased to see you here; you are not a good hunter and warrior that you fall again into the hands of my people.”

“ We are more sorry than you, Osceola; but it was an accident; we should not have been caught had not the moon risen just as we reached the spot where your warriors were crossing the river.”

“ Did you not know the moon would rise ? ”

“ Of course, but—— ”

“ You should have gone ashore, where among the shadows of the trees the rays of the moon could not reach you. You have acted like fools; but you have done me a favour, and Osceola does not forget those that act as his friends any more than he forgets him who put irons on his wrists and threw him into prison. Go now, and do not look for me to raise my hand again to help you, if you prove yourselves greater fools than you seem to be now. We part friends, but after this are enemies. Go! ”

It was no time for ceremony or words. Dick Moreton muttered, “ Thank you, Chief,” and dipped his paddle into the water, veering to one side, so as to clear the large canoe in front. The warriors and mixed-breeds remained silent and made no attempt to obstruct his passage. None dared to oppose Osceola, though in their hearts they bitterly condemned his unaccountable partiality toward these youths, the father of one of whom was already in the ranks of their armed enemies. Keen must have been the regret of the mongrels and pure-bloods that they had not shot both boys the instant they came within range.

An hour later and while the night still lasted, Dick Moreton and Jack Raymore reached the village (now an important town in Florida), where the latter had made his home all his life, and, a month

later, with the consent of their parents, they entered the military service of the United States, for it had then become clear that not only were dark days come to the Territory, but still darker were at hand.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MAJOR DADE AND HIS MEN.

BY the close of the year 1835, the situation in Florida was so alarming that not only the inhabitants of the Territory but the country itself became anxious. It was claimed that the Seminoles had fully four thousand warriors, mixed-breeds, and negroes in the field, and they threatened to overwhelm the weak military forces, stationed at widely separated points. The settlers fled to the fortified camps for protection, and, as is always the case, many innocent men, women, and children fell victims to the ferocity of the mongrels, who showed mercy to no one.

Although Osceola was recognized as the real leader of the hostiles, there were a large number of other chiefs, as brave, skilful, and unrelenting in their warfare. While raids by small parties were numerous, large bands gathered here and there and fought the whites with such desperation that it seemed for a time that they must prevail and desolate the entire Floridas.

The history of the country proves that when a

war breaks out it generally finds it unprepared. It has been shown that it was generally believed the Seminoles would accept the conditions of the treaty of Payne's Landing, as it was termed, and move with their families to the reservation set apart for them in the Indian Territory; but, as already stated, the treaty was repudiated by an overwhelming majority, notwithstanding seven chiefs were dragooned into signing it. The Seminoles hid their families in the impenetrable swamps, where the white scouts were never able to locate them, and then stripped for the fray.

General Clinch and his garrison at Fort King were in imminent danger. His force was so small that there was reason to fear it would succumb to an impending attack, but reinforcements reached him in time to give a feeling of security, which, however, could not in the nature of things long continue.

Well aware of the necessity of striking the hostiles a crushing blow, Major Francis L. Dade, a native of Virginia, accompanied by one hundred and eight officers and men, set out to march to Fort King, from which point it was intended to send a strong expedition against the Seminoles. For a time all went well, but on the morning of the 28th of December, when four miles from the encampment of the night before, and only a short distance

from Fort King, his command was assailed with irrestrainable fury by a force of Seminoles and mixed breeds.

The first warning the troops received was when a destructive volley was poured into them. At the first fire, Major Dade, his horse, and most of the advance-guard were killed. The official report of this sad affair, made by Captain Belton of the Second Artillery, contains these words:

“ Lieutenant Mudge, Third Artillery, received his mortal wound the first fire and afterward received several other wounds. Lieutenant Basenger, Third Artillery, was not wounded until after the second attack; and, at the latter part of it, he was wounded several times before he was tomahawked. Captain Gardener, Second Artillery, was not wounded until the second attack, and, at the last part of it, Mr. Basenger, after Captain Gardener was killed, remarked, ‘ I am the only officer left; and, boys, we will do the best we can.’ Lieutenant Keays, Third Artillery, had both arms broken at the first shot, was unable to act, and was tomahawked the latter part of the second attack by a negro. Lieutenant Henderson had his left arm broken at the first fire, and after that, with a musket, fired at least thirty or forty shots. Dr. Gatlin was not killed until after the second attack, nor was he wounded; he placed himself behind the breast-

work, and with two double-barrelled guns, said he had four barrels for them. Captain Frazer fell early in the action."

Although caught at fearful disadvantage, the troops under Captain Gardener fought with such bravery that the Indians were repelled; but, well aware that they would soon return and renew the attack, the soldiers began throwing up breastworks. Trees were felled and placed atop of one another in the form of a triangle, but while the soldiers were working desperately, and before the defence was half completed, the Seminoles attacked with greater fury than before.

The troops had a single field-piece which was brought into play, but the Indians and negroes shot down every one who attempted to serve it. Still the hopeless fight continued, until two thirds of the men and officers had fallen, when the ammunition gave out. The assailants were quick to perceive this, and rushing out from cover they despatched every one except four who escaped by feigning death. Although each was badly wounded, they managed to creep into the woods unnoticed. Behind the triangle of logs referred to lay the bodies of the thirty men who had attempted to use it as a protection.

One of the four men who escaped was discovered by Indians the day after the battle and slain. The

other three succeeded in reaching Tampa Bay with the terrifying news.

General Gaines arrived from New Orleans in January with a force of seven hundred men and sent out a detachment under Captain Hitchcock to visit the scene of the massacre. This lamentable occurrence possesses a historical value which warrants giving the report of Captain Hitchcock.

“ The force encamped on the night of February 19th, on the ground occupied by Major Dade on the night of the 27th of December. He and his party were destroyed on the morning of the 28th, about four miles in advance of the position. He was advancing toward this post [Fort King] and was attacked from the north, so that on the 20th instant we came on the rear of the battle-ground about nine o'clock in the morning. Our advanced guard had passed the ground without halting, when the General and his staff came upon one of the most appalling spectacles that can be imagined. We first saw some broken and scattered boxes; then a cart; then two oxen which were lying dead, as if they had fallen asleep, their yokes still on them; a little to the right, one or two horses were seen. We then came to a small inclosure, made by felling trees in such a manner as to form a triangular breastwork for defence. Within the triangle, along the north and west faces of it, were about thirty bodies,

mostly mere skeletons, although much of the clothing was left upon them. These were lying, almost every one of them, in precisely the position they must have occupied during the fight, their heads next to the logs, over which they had delivered their fire, and their bodies stretched, with striking regularity, parallel to each other. They had evidently been shot dead at their posts, and the Indians had not disturbed them, except by taking the scalps of most of them.

“ Passing this little breastwork, we found other bodies along the road, and by the side of the road, generally behind trees which had been resorted to for covers from the enemy’s fire. Advancing about two hundred yards farther, we found a cluster of bodies in the middle of the road. These were evidently the advanced guard, in the rear of which was the body of Major Dade, and, to the right, that of Captain Frazer.

“ These were all doubtless shot down on the first fire of the Indians, except, perhaps, Captain Frazer, who must, however, have fallen very early in the fight. Those in the road and by the trees fell during the first attack. It was during a cessation of the fire that the little band still remaining, about thirty in number, threw up the triangular breastwork, which, from the haste with which it was constructed, was necessarily

defective and could not protect the men in the second attack.

“ We had with us many of the personal friends of the officers of Major Dade’s command; and it is gratifying to be able to state that every officer was identified by undoubted evidence. They were buried, and the cannon, a six-pounder, that the Indians had thrown into a swamp, was recovered, and placed vertically at the head of the grave, where it is to be hoped it will long remain. The bodies of the non-commissioned officers and privates were buried in two graves, and it was found that every man was accounted for. The command was composed of 8 officers and 102 non-commissioned officers and privates. The bodies of 8 officers and 98 men were interred—4 men having escaped, 3 of whom reached Tampa Bay; the fourth was killed the day after the battle. It may be proper to add that the attack was not made from a hummock, but in a thinly wooded country, the Indians being concealed by palmetto and grass, which has since been burned.”

Such is the story of the massacre of Major Dade and his command, which caused as profound a sensation throughout the country as that of General Custer, forty years later, by the Sioux Indians. While the latter was censurable for his headlong recklessness, there was no ground for criticism of the

unfortunate Major Dade, who advanced into the Indian country carefully and deliberately, and used every precaution against surprise; but it was impossible to escape the fearful danger of an ambuscade; for it may be said he was exposed to it almost from the first. The region was thickly wooded, the Seminoles were on the alert, and were certain to use every natural advantage to the utmost.

In this affair Osceola was the principal leader, and he fought with the desperate bravery he showed on all other occasions. It would be thought that he had done enough for one day's record, and yet it was on that same 28th of December, 1835, that he did a deed which in its way was as startling as the massacre of Major Dade and his command.

CHAPTER XXX.

OSCEOLA'S RECKONING.

DICK MORETON and Jack Raymore, tall, strong, sturdy, patriotic, and brave, could not fail to make excellent soldiers in the service of their country, despite the fact that they were still boys when they donned the uniform of the infantry, and it was necessary for the officers not to be too particular in their inquiries as to their respective ages. Both were enrolled as members of the company under the command of Captain Moreton, the father of Dick, and the uncle of Jack, whose company formed a part of the garrison of Fort King. For several weeks after their enlistment, the defenders, spent their time in a condition of expectancy, as may be said; they were looking for an attack by the Seminoles, which, however, was never made. Before the hostiles could gather sufficient numbers to tempt them to the effort, the garrison was strengthened by reinforcements which deterred an assault.

Eph Ashley was attached to the fort as a scout, and continued his incursions upon the surrounding

country, many times bringing back valuable information. As the days passed without any stirring occurrence within or near the post, the commander allowed Dick and Jack to accompany their old friend on his ventures, though Captain Moreton was never quite satisfied, since, despite the assurance of Eph, he could not but believe that danger was always lurking in the woods.

It was on the 27th of December, 1835, that the cousins went on a scout with the veteran which took them so far from the fort that they spent the night in the solitude. They had done this several times, and felt no misgivings, though one of the three was on guard from darkness till sunrise. Nothing significant was discovered, and the day was well advanced, when they drew near the fort, at the end of their self-imposed task.

The three were following a well-marked trail, Eph in advance, with Dick directly behind and Jack bringing up the rear. They were now so near home that they conversed freely.

"It 's my opinion," said the scout, "that the varmints ain't likely to make any trouble at the fort."

"Why not?" asked Dick.

"'Cause they can't see any chance of its paying 'em; we 're strong 'nough to stand off two thousand of 'em."

“ But there are said to be double that number on the war-path.”

“ And it 's true, and Osceola is managin' the whole bus'ness; but neither him nor any of the chiefs can git half or a quarter of the warriors and half-breeds together in the same company; they 're strong 'nough to strike at different p'ints, and I tell you they 're knockin' things endways; there 's got to be a good many more soldiers in Floridy afore the varmints can be given the lickin' that will stop their deviltry.”

“ President Jackson will send them, when he finds they are needed,” ventured Jack from the rear of the procession.

“ Of course he will, for he 's an old soldier himself; he 's fout Injins, and they 're afeard of ' P'inted Arrow,' as they call him. If he would only come down here with some of them Kentuckians and Tennesseans that he fit the battle of New Orleans with and knocked the Britishers sky-high, he 'd make short work of the varmints. I s'pose it 's 'cause he 's President that he feels too proud to do anything like that.”

“ It is n't because he is too proud, Eph, but the President never takes the field during a war. He can direct matters, but it won't do for him to risk his life on the battle-field.”

“ I s'pose it 's ag'in the Constitution, but I

should n't wonder, if things go on this way much longer, if Old Hickory kicks the Constitution out of the winder and pitches in himself. If he does," added the scout, who had a great admiration for Jackson, "won't the fur fly? Wal, I *rayther* think so."

"He has plenty of good officers and soldiers to send; it seems to me, as you say, that the Government is slow, but there can be no doubt about the end of it all. When the Indian tries to fight the white man, he must always go down. They tried it two hundred years ago in New England but failed, and what chance can there be now when there are twenty times as many white folks as then?"

"Chance 'nough to make a good deal of deviltry—helloa!"

All three stood still at the same moment. From the direction of the fort came the faint reports of several rifles. While the little party were silently listening they heard a shrill whoop and then all was still.

"There 's something wrong there," remarked the scout, turning round and looking in the faces of the boys; "if I ain't mistook, that yawp was made by an Injin; I orter be there, for it looks as if it 's a part of my bus'ness."

He started along the path, walking fast, with

head and shoulders thrown forward and his senses on the alert, as was his practice when scouting near a hostile camp. The youths, who had had considerable experience in the same business, imitated him, so that as the three advanced in Indian file, they were like so many phantoms or shadows, whose feet were shod with silence.

Suddenly, without warning, they heard the sounds of approaching footsteps. Some one was running along the trail toward them. It was not necessary for the scout to tell his companions what to do. Simultaneously with him, they leaped aside from the path and darted to the shelter of the nearest tree. It happened that Dick Moreton and Eph stood within a couple of paces of each other, while Jack was farther off.

The next moment a Seminole came loping into sight, while glimpses of several others could be seen behind and beyond him. With a strange thrill, Dick and Jack recognized the foremost as Osceola. The scout of course was equally quick to identify him, and with his odd chuckle he brought his long-barrelled rifle to his shoulder.

But the consummate woodcraft of the Seminole warned him of his danger. He stopped as abruptly as if he had collided with a palmetto, gave one lightning-like glance in the direction of the whites, and then, ducking his head, wheeled and ran swiftly

back, his companions doing the same so quickly that they did not check his progress in the least.

"You're purty fast, Seminole," exclaimed Eph Ashley, with a grin of triumph, "but a bullet from my gun is a good deal faster."

Hardly had the thought found expression when the trigger was pulled, but a fraction of a second previous Dick Moreton leaped forward and with his outstretched hand knocked the barrel aside. The bullet sped wide of the mark, and before the scout could snatch a weapon from either of the boys, all of the Seminoles had disappeared.

Eph's eyes glittered with a dangerous light as he turned upon Dick Moreton and with a savage exclamation demanded,—

"Why did you do that?"

"To save the life of Osceola," calmly replied the youth, who, seeing the justifiable anger of the veteran, made haste to explain.

"He saved my life, and I promised him that, if 't was in my power, when I saw a gun aimed at him I would turn it aside; I have kept my promise."

"And I give you notice that if you ever do a thing like that again, I 'll *shoot you*!"

"I don't think Dick will," Jack Raymore hastened to say; "it's the second time he saved Osceola from you, and when we parted from him on the river, after you had left us and he made the other

Seminoles keep their hands off, Osceola warned us that it was the last time he would do anything of the kind."

"That is true," said Dick; "I did not think of it, but when you levelled your gun, my pledge to the chief came back to me, and, even though I had been certain you would have wrested my gun from my hand and turned it against me, I would have done just as I did."

There was nothing the scout admired more than pluck and grit. It was not the first time he had seen both of these boys display the quality. There was something, too, in their sense of honour that appealed to him. He and the Seminole were mortal enemies, but the chief and the youths were not. All the same, he was chagrined and exasperated that the savage should escape him again, and he could not rally in a single minute from his resentful feeling.

This was the very day of the massacre of Major Dade and his command, not far off, but none of the three had as yet heard the terrifying news. Nevertheless, Eph Ashley was morally certain that the chief was fleeing from the commission of some startling crime, for which, in the opinion of the scout, Osceola deserved a death far less merciful than from the bullet of a rifle.

"Now it 's all well 'nough," said Eph in a

gentler voice, "to remember them as has done you a good turn, but you 've 'listed to fight Seminoles, half-breeds, and darkies, and if you aint ready to fight 'em all, the best thing you can do is to quit trying to fight any. You can't make no exceptions. Don't you see that it 's Osceola that makes up three fourths of all this deviltry? Don't you understand that if you had n't sheltered him behind your boat some months ago when I chased him into the river, there would have been a good many men, women, and children living to-day that he was the means of puttin' under ground?"

"That may be true," admitted Dick, "but if he had refused to befriend me and Jack our lives would n't have been worth a pin, and you would have been walking alone this afternoon."

"Yes, and Osceola would n't have been walking at all," grimly responded the scout, half in earnest and half jocosely.

"But," interposed Jack again, "I understand Dick to admit that the account between him and Osceola is closed."

His cousin nodded his head.

"If you (for he cares little for me), fall into his power again he won't raise a hand to help you."

"I have n't a particle of doubt on that point. If he had his gun raised to fire and, with his finger on

the trigger, he discovered that it was aimed at me, I believe (though, mind you, I am not positive) he would let fly."

"And should you see Eph or any one drawing bead on him?"

"I should n't interfere."

"Which the same being so, we'll shake," was the hearty exclamation of the scout, now wholly mollified. Accordingly they clasped hands and the cloud was brushed away from between them.

Cordial relations having been established, the little party hurried forward to the fort, for the scout was positive that Osceola had committed some daring act, and that the people there had suffered. When they arrived they quickly learned the truth, which may be thus told:

The 28th of December was an unusually mild day even for that section. Within a short distance of the fort stood the house of a Mr. Rogers, where at the time to which we refer he and nine other gentlemen were dining, Mr. Rogers being at the head of the table. Because of the mildness of the weather, the door and all the windows were open, and the party were chatting pleasantly, their conversation naturally turning upon the trouble with the Seminoles.

"They cannot last much longer," remarked General Thompson, to whom Mr. Rogers had just addressed a remark; "the Government is awake to

the situation and the President will give us all the troops we need."

"But the Government, as usual, is slow," replied Lieutenant Smith; "though, as an officer, it may not be in good taste for me to say so. We have already lost too many through its dilatoriness."

"The American people are slow to anger," continued the General, "but when their wrath is roused it's wise to stand from under. We smite with the hammer of Thor."

"But it does little good to strike when you hit nothing," observed Mr. Rogers. "I know of nothing more wrenching than to kick at vacancy. I once did it," he added with a laugh, "and did n't get over it for a week."

"Do you consider the Seminoles as vacancy, or nothing?" inquired Mr. Hitzler.

"In one sense, yes. Those mongrels strike here to-day, and by the time you can gather yourself together to strike back, they are miles away dealing other blows. That's the difficulty—they won't stand their ground and fight like civilized beings."

"It has been characteristic of the Indians from the settlement at Jamestown," said the Lieutenant, "and therefore it must be taken into account when we go to war with them. We need trained woodsmen and plenty of them. I confess that mat-

ters looked pretty threatening in this place only a little while ago."

"Do you mean here at the fort?" asked General Thompson, holding his wine-glass suspended.

The younger officer nodded.

"What nonsense! There has never been an hour when we were not as safe as if in the city of Washington or New Orleans."

"Then you have no fear, General, of Osceola, who has made so many threats against you because you put him in irons some months ago?"

"I have heard of his threats, and several officious friends have been good enough to ask me to be careful, but the matter is beneath contempt."

The words were hardly uttered, to which others were responding with laughter, when the crash of guns sounded seemingly directly under the windows. Osceola and a number of his warriors, who had stolen swiftly and stealthily out of the woods near at hand, ran across the open space, and paused long enough to fire among the guests, when they rushed through the open door and into the dining-room.

Comprehending what it all meant, the unwounded gentlemen sprang from their chairs, leaped through the open windows and ran for their lives. Those who providentially took the direction to the fort reached it in safety, though several shots were fired at them. Five thus got away in safety, but un-

fortunately some of the others headed for a hummock near by and were shot down while fleeing.

Osceola was the first to dash into the dining-room, where he paused for a minute and looked round for victims to his anger. Seeing no one, he turned and ran out again. As he did so he brushed past a barrel behind which the cook, a coloured man, had crouched and was not observed.

Five guests were killed. They were General Thompson, Lieutenant Constantine Smith, Erastus Rogers, sutler; Mr. Suggs, and Mr. Hitzler. Each was scalped; and as the Seminoles withdrew Osceola paused for an instant and, looking toward the fort, uttered his peculiar shrill yell that the garrison might make no mistake as to the leader in the dreadful business. Such was the Seminole chief's reckoning with General Thompson for the indignity to which he had subjected him when he placed irons on his person and thrust him into jail.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

THE war between the Seminoles and United States forces increased in fierceness. The mongrels were reinforced by runaway negroes and desperate members of other tribes, who stole into the Everglades and dismal swamps, from which they issued, whenever opportunity offered, and fought with the viciousness of wildcats. There was no thought of surrender by any party of contestants when they met. The whole Territory was thrown into panic, and hundreds of fugitives were reduced to such distress that Congress passed a bill to relieve their necessities.

General Gaines arrived a second time at Tampa, in February, 1836, with a powerful force in three steamboats, and a few days later marched toward the Indian country, but changed the line of march and arrived at Fort King on Washington's birthday. A number of skirmishes followed in which there was considerable loss on both sides. A serious engagement was fought with a thousand hostiles on the Ouithlacoochee, in which General Gaines was

wounded. After severe fighting, the Indians proposed to stop all resistance, asserting that they were tired of it. Osceola headed a delegation which entered our lines under a flag of truce. While negotiations for a general surrender were under way, the Seminoles became suspicious that a trap was being set for them, hurriedly withdrew, and the war was renewed.

General Gaines now turned over his command to General Clinch and went to New Orleans, this action being due to the appointment of General Winfield Scott to command in Florida. Clinch marched with his force to Fort Draine, where Scott arrived about the middle of March. Fighting continued through the summer, but in the autumn it was impossible to perceive that our troops had made the slightest progress toward the conquest of the Seminoles. The most important success of Scott was in April, 1836, when he rounded up four hundred hostiles, mostly women and children, who were forwarded from Tampa to the Indian Territory.

The site of Fort Draine was found to be so unhealthful that it was evacuated in July. While the troops and wagon-train were on their way to Fort Defiance, they were attacked by Indians, and had not reinforcements arrived, they would have suffered the fate of Major Dade and his command.

Although Micanopy was nominally the foremost chief of the Seminoles, Osceola was the leading spirit in that remarkable war. He sent emissaries to the Cherokees of Alabama, many of whom joined him. Hostilities approached so near Jacksonville that more than once the frightened inhabitants heard the sounds of musketry firing. The soldiers succeeded in enlisting a large number of friendly Indians, who gave valuable help in running down the hostiles. Governor Call with two thousand men, including a number of Creeks, fought one of the most stubborn battles of the war at Wahoo Swamp in the latter part of November. The Seminoles under Osceola resisted with such daring and skill that when the contest ended neither side could claim a victory, and the mutual losses were about the same.

By order of the Secretary of War, General Thomas S. Jesup assumed command in Florida. This officer was exasperated by the criticism to which he was subjected because of his fruitless efforts to bring the war to a close. He did everything possible, and once it looked as if the end had come, but the large force of hostiles whom he succeeded in bringing together with the promise of surrender on their part, broke away and fled again to their swamps. In this proceeding, Osceola was the leader. Jesup was abused so virulently that he asked the Secretary of

War to relieve him of command. The request was refused, and during the summer a number of Shawnees, Delawares, and Kickapoos were brought from the West to help subdue the Seminoles. The whole number of dusky allies thus secured was about a thousand.

In the month of October, 1837, an incident took place of so extraordinary a nature (the like having never been known before or since in our history), that we are sure the reader will thank us for giving the particulars, all of which may be depended upon as being strictly true.

Despite the bravery and skill with which Osceola and his warriors maintained the fight against the United States troops, he was sagacious enough to see that there could be but one end to it all. He might prolong the war for a long time, but he could not avert the final disaster. Why not make terms while it was possible to secure favorable conditions ?

It was about the middle of the month that the war-chief sent a message to Fort Peyton asking for an interview with General Hernandez. He asked, further, that General Jesup would come out and talk with him. Instead of making answer, Jesup despatched Lieutenant Peyton with instructions to persuade Osceola and his companions to enter the fort and then to make them prisoners, but the

Seminole was too wary to be caught thus. General Hernandez was then sent with two hundred men to parley with Osceola. While the interview was under way, Jesup directed Lieutenant Peyton to learn whether the answers of the delegation were satisfactory. The Lieutenant soon returned with the report that the replies of the Seminole leader were the reverse of satisfactory. Jesup could scarcely contain his anger. Turning to Major Ashby he ordered him to capture Osceola and all his companions, regardless of the fact that they were under the protection of a flag of truce.

Major Ashby obeyed orders. With the help of Hernandez, seventy-five Seminoles, among whom was Osceola, were made prisoners, without the firing of a gun. This violation of the laws of nations took place October 21, 1837.

If the criticism of General Jesup had been severe before, his denunciation now became unsparing to the last degree. He was condemned throughout the country for an act of treachery as flagrant as that of any committed by the Indians themselves. His excuse was that the hostiles by their repeated treacheries had placed themselves outside the pale of civilized warfare. Moreover, the capture of Osceola and the leading chiefs would prevent the shedding of much innocent blood, and the officer maintained that the action of the leaders was only a

trick to gain time in which to prepare for still more shocking outrages.

Be all this as it may, this violation of the sacredness of the flag of truce must always remain a blot upon our honour, for it was never disavowed by the Government.

Having a firm grip upon the most dreaded of the hostiles, General Jesup made sure that they did not escape him. They were sent to St. Augustine, from whence after they had been kept awhile, Osceola was removed to Fort Moultrie, Charleston. The heart of the once terrible war-chief was broken. He spent hours in gloomy meditation, looking longingly southward toward his native land, hopeless, despairing, and with his once proud spirit utterly crushed. He felt that death was at hand, and he was glad of it, for life had lost all attraction for him. His health and strength rapidly declined, and during the first days of 1838, he breathed his last. If ever a man died of a broken heart it was Osceola, war-chief of the Seminoles.

And still the war went on. The belief that the wholesale capture of the leaders would bring the hostiles to terms proved a woeful mistake, for the fighting continued as desperately as ever. General Zachary Taylor, afterward President of the United States, succeeded General Jesup in com-

mand. At Lake Okeechobee, on Christmas, 1837, he fought the severest battle that had yet occurred in Florida. He had 28 men killed and 111 wounded, the loss of the hostiles probably being slightly greater. While the battle might be classed as indecisive, the Seminoles gained a more vivid idea of the effectiveness of United States troops when fighting with anything like an equal chance.

Captain Moreton never displayed more bravery than in this sanguinary conflict, the severity of which is shown by the fact that every officer of four companies, with a single exception, and every orderly sergeant of the same companies, was killed, and the sergeant-major was mortally wounded.

In the company led by Captain Moreton were his son Dick and his nephew Jack Raymore, and no veterans acquitted themselves more gallantly than they. An unfortunate and yet fortunate issue was the result of their bravery. The officer was so severely wounded that he was kept out of further service for several months. As soon as able, he resumed duty, and it may be added that he went through the Seminole war to the end, finally sheathing his sword when the eagle of a colonel gleamed on his shoulders.

Jack Raymore was so badly hurt in the leg that when the wound healed it was found that he would be slightly crippled for life. His soldier days,

therefore, came to an end. Dick Moreton was struck three times during the battle, and the surgeon declared that he could not live more than a few hours, but the gallant youth disappointed and delighted everyone who knew him by fully recovering and taking the field again before his father was able to join him. He was in many skirmishes and fierce contests during the remaining four years of the war, but never again did he receive so much as a scratch. So, while it may be said that our three friends were unfortunate in being injured, they were highly fortunate in escaping with their lives. As for Cato, the coloured servant, investigation proved that he entered the ranks of the hostiles, and lost his life in the severe battle of Lake Okeechobee.

Our few remaining words must be of a historical character. After General Jesup had been defeated and wounded, he declared that the conquest of the Seminoles was an impossibility. He had used Indians against them, and violated the flag of truce, but they still defied the whole armed forces of the United States. Finally, Jesup was ordered to the Cherokee country, and General Taylor's plans being disarranged by the President, he was succeeded by General McComb, in April, 1838.

It was about this time that thirty-three blood-

hounds were imported from Cuba for the purpose of tracking the hostiles into the swamps. They were under the charge of five Spaniards, but, to the disgust of the projectors, the dogs refused to take the trail of a single Indian, though ready enough to track negroes as they had been trained to do. It was said that some of the brutes upon entering the woods made friends with the Seminoles and negroes, who employed them to trail the white soldiers.

General McComb, having patched up a worthless truce with a few chiefs, left Florida, and was succeeded by General W. R. Armistead, who attempted a more conciliatory policy, but when apparently on the eve of success the hostiles took to the swamps again, and matters remained in the same disheartening shape as before. This was in 1840, and General Armistead, utterly discouraged, so reported to the Secretary of War.

Here is a fact worthy of preservation, though it is recorded in no history of the Seminole war: General Gabriel Rains invented the first torpedo and used it against the Seminoles in April, 1840. It exploded prematurely, and Rains, who was then a captain, went with sixteen men to investigate. They were attacked by one hundred Seminoles, and the captain was so desperately wounded that he was carried back to Fort King in the arms of his men. The torpedo rendered no aid in the war, the

soldiers holding the invention in great dread. A second one that had been placed at the post was removed by the captain himself when sufficiently recovered.

It was General Rains who, after the battle of Seven Pines, in the Civil War, at the request of General Lee, undertook to check the Union fleet, that was preparing to ascend the James to Richmond, by laying a number of submarine torpedoes, the first of which was placed on the James River bank opposite Drury's bluff. This was the precursor of all such inventions, now known all over the world, as every civilized nation has its torpedo corps.

At last General William J. Worth was placed in command in Florida, and he did what none of his predecessors was able to do—ended the Seminole war.

He took charge in the spring of 1841. During the summer he sent small parties into the swamps, where they destroyed not only the shelters of the hostiles, but the crops upon which the living of their families depended through the winter. Eph Ashley, who was especially active in this work, with the aid of a number as daring as himself, captured a prominent chief, who was brought to Tampa in irons. There he was put to the best use of his stormy life. With the chief were a considerable number

of other prisoners. General Worth found out that this Indian was one of the most prominent leaders of his tribe. He was allowed to name five of his fellow-prisoners, who were sent to the hostiles with notice that if they did not come in and surrender by a certain day named by the chief the latter and every one of the captives would be put to death.

This simple proceeding was the master-stroke of the war. The message brought by the five Indians thrilled the mongrels for the first time with fear. Desperate, emaciated, cadaverous, in rags, bare-footed, and starving, they began straggling into camp. The dismal Everglades ejected their terrible denizens, who handed over to their captors the flintlocks with which they had done such frightful work, and sullenly awaited their fate.

The Government lost no time in removing them to the Indian Territory, and Florida was forever rid of them as a tribe, though, as is well known, many of their descendants are still found within the State. Since the removal, the Seminoles have formed one of the Five Civilized Tribes, all of whom have made such advancement in education, government, and true progress that they well deserve the distinguishing name by which they are known.

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